



BLUE AND GRAY WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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No. 29.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 24, 1905.

Price 5 Cents.

UP THE YAZOO; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE WITH SHERMAN

By LIEUT HARRY LEE.



It was an exciting race. The two boys reached the boat first, and one turned to shake his fist at the girl spy when three of the Boys in Blue leaped into the water. So wild was their rush that the boat was swamped.

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UP THE YAZOO;

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By LIEUT. HARRY LEE.

CHAPTER I.

ON BOARD THE GUNBOAT.

"Hurrah!" cried Lieutenant Hal Martin, of the Fairdale Blues, a company of youths who were serving in the Union army under Sherman in the first move on Vicksburg. "We're only a mile from the mouth of the Yazoo river, boys! We'll soon be peppering the Confederates in the trenches. We'll drive them out of Vicksburg just as we did out of Fort Donelson!"

The company of young soldiers on the deck of the gunboat gave a ringing cheer.

The scene was on the Mississippi river, in the month of December, 1862. The gunboats of Admiral Porter were engaged in escorting a fleet of transports to the mouth of the Yazoo river. General Sherman, acting under orders from General Grant, was about to make an attack upon Vicksburg, and what the Confederates deemed the most impregnable of all their fortifications.

The Fairdale Blues was an organization of young volunteers from a New York town, then known as Fairdale.

They were mostly under the age of twenty, and were commanded by Captain Jack Clark, as handsome and brave a lad as ever wore the uniform of blue.

The Blues had been mustered in Washington, and had first served under McClellan. But, at their own request, they had later been transferred to the west.

So bravely had they fought at Donelson and Shiloh that General Grant had become deeply interested in them.

It had been his wont to entrust the little company of Blues with many a dangerous mission and scouting expedition.

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues and their young commander welcomed anything of this sort.

They were fearless and intrepid, and sought to go where danger was the greatest. They had lost many of their number in the various battles in which they had been engaged, but their ranks had always quickly filled up with recruits.

The Blues, with other soldiers, were on one of the gunboats of Admiral Porter and waiting to make a landing.

But, for some unknown reason, there was a long and tedious delay. The gunboats remained at anchor at the mouth of the Yazoo.

Now, it happened that, on board the same gunboat with the Blues was a company known as the "Tiger Tails." Each member of this company wore a bit of tiger skin suspended from the crown of his cap.

They were an independent organization, like the Blues, and were made up of the scourgings of the streets of lower

New York. They had never figured conspicuously in any great battle as yet, but, from their bluster and bravado, one would think that each of their number was a hero.

The Blues were all schoolboys and of good families. As soon as they boarded the gunboat the Tiger Tails regarded them with a sort of malicious jealousy.

Jack Clark had noted this at once. He had essayed to be pleasant with their captain, a broad-chested little tough who called himself Larry Legree.

The Tiger Tails were of an ignorant class, and many of them were noted as brawlers and fist-fighters.

Jack foresaw the possibility of trouble at once, and instructed his boys to keep on their own side of the boat, and to go to any length before becoming involved in trouble.

The Tiger Tails proceeded at once to raise pandemonium aboard the gunboat. In some way whisky had been smuggled aboard, and several of their number became drunk.

"Jack," said Hal Martin, to the young captain of the Blues, "I certainly hope we won't have trouble with those fellows. But I must tell you that I fear it is coming."

"They seem to be getting hilarious."

"Yes; I just heard them plotting to do up the captain and engineer and get control of the boat."

Jack Clark's face grew grim.

"I don't think it will pay them to try that," he said. "To be sure, Captain Lewis has but a few bluejackets with him, but I fancy we could help him enough to make things lively for Captain Legree."

"Several of them have tried to make trouble with the boys. They call our boys stuck-up and high-toned."

"We don't mind that, if it goes no further," said Jack. "I certainly hope we'll have no trouble. Uncle Sam needs his men to fight the Confederacy. He can't afford to have them fight among themselves."

Just then there was an uproar on the upper deck. The sound of blows was heard, and down the companionway came tumbling a couple of the Tiger Tails.

In an instant there was an uproar among the Tiger Tails. They rushed to the foot of the stairs excitedly. But the bluejackets, with cutlasses in hand, faced them.

"Pull 'em down, boys!"

"They've tackled our men. Give 'em a dose of their own medicine."

But, though the young toughs howled and threatened, none essayed to climb the narrow stairs.

"Ther fust lantern-jawed lobster that comes up here will git his gizzard cut open!" yelled the sergeant of the bluejackets, as he shook his cutlass.

At this moment the captain of the gunboat leaned over the rail of the bridge and shouted:

"Captain Legree, keep your men on the deck, or there'll be trouble. No one is allowed up hyar but ther gunners an' crew."

"Do you own this 'ere boat?" blustered Captain Legree. "I reckon ye don't."

"Uncle Sam owns this boat, but I am the captain," replied Lewis.

"Oh, ye are! Well, ye ain't got no right to throw my men around like that."

"Your men were ordered to leave this deck. They refused to obey."

"I don't keer a hang!" cried the captain of the Tiger Tails. "If you'll come here I'll settle it with you in good American style," and he squared off with clenched fists.

"Captain Legree," said Lewis, "your manner is undignified for the captain of a military company. I don't intend to fight ye nor have any trouble with ye. I'll be mighty glad to put ye ashore, where ye'll likely git all the fightin' ye want between here an' Vicksburg."

"You old shrimp-faced coward!" yelled the young tough. "You're afeard to come down."

But Captain Lewis went into the pilot house. None of the Tiger Tails seemed to care about climbing the stairs held by the bluejackets.

But the tough young captain of the Tiger Tails was ugly.

He was looking for trouble and determined to find it. He stalked sullenly forward and sat down by the companionway. There he glowered fiercely at any who passed him.

After this episode the Tiger Tails seemed to calm down a trifle.

But it was only a lull before the fresh breaking out of the storm. Jack Clark had occasion to go aft. In passing the companionway, suddenly Legree slipped his right foot out and tripped him.

Jack went sprawling. He was up like a flash, though. Legree was grinning, and roars of derisive laughter went up from his comrades.

In all his life the young captain of the Fairdale Blues had never been angrier. Quivering with wrath, he stepped forward, and with one swing of his foot kicked the chair out from under Legree.

It was the young tough's turn to go sprawling. But he sprung up like a cat.

He glared at Jack with malevolent fury.

He was much heavier and stouter. As he faced the young captain of the Blues it was certain that he felt this superiority.

"You lily-faced cub!" he hissed. "What did ye do that for? I'll smash ye for it!"

"Turnabout is fair play," said Jack, coolly. "You tried a practical joke on me, and I simply retaliated."

"Ye tripped over my feet. It was yer own fault."

"I don't like to call you a liar," said Jack; "but I must say that you intended to do just what you did."

"Oh, ye call me a liar? That's a fightin' word!" howled Legree. "Ye've got to give me satisfaction for that!"

"What do you call satisfaction?"

"I'll whip you, or you'll whip me."

"Will you be satisfied if I whip you?"

The young tough grinned.

"Yas, if ye kin do it."

"Well," said Jack, very calmly, "I'm not a pugilist, and I don't want to fight. But you are a cock whose comb

must be cut sooner or later. I want to know if there will be fair play?"

"In course there will! Oh, ye needn't be afeard. I won't need to call for help!" jeered Legree. "It'll be all over in two minutes."

"Well, I think it will," and Jack turned and gave a sharp order.

"Attention, Blues! Fall in! Form double line along starboard rail! Ready! Fix bayonets!"

Like a machine, the Blues obeyed the order.

"What are ye goin' ter do?" demanded Legree. "Are ye goin' ter call on them ter help ye if ye git ther wust of it?"

"No, sir!" cried Jack. "But I don't intend that your friends shall help you."

Legree laughed scoffingly.

"Don't ye fret about that. I can lick you with my hands tied. Attention, Tigers! Fall in! Dress front!"

The Tigers, with some confusion, obeyed the order. They filled the air with all sorts of scurrilous remarks. Jack Clark saw that it would take but little to precipitate a general fight.

At this moment Hal approached him.

"What on earth are you going to do, Jack?" he asked. "You surely aren't going to fight that tough! He is a regular pugilist."

"I don't care what he is," said Jack, resolutely. "He needs a bad beating, and I'll give it to him. Don't interfere unless his followers do."

Hal fell back. He saw that his young captain was in earnest, and it would be no use to attempt to dissuade him.

Jack threw down his cap and pulled off his jacket. He rolled up his sleeves.

Legree, with a malicious grin of delight on his face, stripped to the waist.

"I'll show ye some fun, boys!" he said, confidently. "I'll make a dish-rag out of him ther fust rush."

There was tremendous excitement now. The Tiger Tails filled the air with jeering yells and cries. The Blues, quiet but resolute, awaited the orders of their young captain.

The sailors gathered on the deck above. Even the stokers came up from the engine room.

A fight was something to relieve the monotony of the tedious trip down the Mississippi and the tiresome wait that they were now having in the mouth of the Yazoo.

When the two men faced each other there seemed to be but one consensus of opinion. This was that tough Legree would have an easy task.

CHAPTER II.

SUBDUING A BULLY.

Jack Clark had not accepted the chances of a fight with Legree without full and due consideration.

Fist-fighting was something which he did not like. But he knew that there was bound to be trouble aboard the gunboat.

If it reached culmination in a single combat, such as the present one, a great end would have been served. Jack was by no means sure of winning.

But he was far from being a novice at the art of boxing. He knew how to hit and get away in the most skilful fashion.

So he faced Legree without a particle of fear, and very little doubt.

The discrepancy in their physical appearance seemed great.

Legree was knotty and broad of frame. His muscles stood out boldly. Stripped as he was, he looked like a small Sandow.

Jack, on the other hand, was exceedingly slender. But a close observer would have seen that his appearance was exceedingly deceptive.

Clever athletes know too well that prominent and hard muscles do not always indicate power.

Jack was quick and cat-like. His muscles were of the loose and flexible sort, which have a latent power always found to be remarkable.

The two contestants faced each other.

"Come on!" sneered Legree. "Come in ter me, my bully. I'll give ye an op'nin'."

"One word first," said Jack.

"Wall, ye ain't goin' ter quit?"

"Hardly! But we must make an agreement. If I whip you there is to be no more fighting aboard this boat. You are to hold your men back."

"Oh!" said Legree, contemptuously. "Ye seem ter feel pretty sure of ther game."

"Is it a bargain?"

"Yas, I s'pose so; but if I lick you I'll challenge any other man in your company."

At this Corporal Tom Peters stepped out.

"I'm first choice!" he cried. "I'd just like a chance at you, my fine friend."

Tom was short and fat, but enormously strong. He was the crack wrestler of the company.

Legree glowered at him, but replied:

"All right, my covey! I'll take you on next. You'll make a good choppin' block!"

But now the Tiger Tails yelled time. At once Legree put up his fists and made a pass at Jack.

The young captain of the Blues moved his head slightly, and the blow went by. Legree lunged a little too close.

Jack tapped him one in the stomach which drew a grunt from him. He stepped back in angry amazement.

Then, with a savage yell, he went in to smash his antagonist. Wild swings and rushes showed his style of fighting.

Jack simply sidestepped and dodged. None of the blows hit him. Finally Legree overbalanced himself and fell.

When he sprung up he was foaming with baffled fury.

"Why don't ye stand an' fight, ye lobster?" he yelled.

"Are ye a coward out and out?"

"Hardly," replied Jack. "I've been waiting for you to hit me, but you don't seem to have any success."

At this there was laughter, even from Legree's adherents.

It was plain that his followers were losing their respect for him. The Blues sent up a cheer.

Their confidence in their young captain was greatly enhanced. Hal Martin, who had been pale and anxious, now cried:

"Bravo, Jack! You can whip him!"

At this the infuriated young tough made another rush. Undoubtedly, had any of his wild swings hit the mark they would have hurt.

But they seemed to go wide.

Finally Jack straightened up and began to parry them. He saw that violent exertion had weakened the force of them, and he could now afford to receive a blow in order to return one.

So Legree suddenly found his antagonist closing in upon him.

To his surprise, he began to feel heavy blows coming his way. A right-hander caught him in the eye, and for an instant he saw stars. A left-hander took him in the jaw, and he went down.

For some seconds he was unable to rise. When he did get up he was groggy and disposed to be cautious.

"Are you satisfied?" asked Jack, as he advanced toward him and easily parried a swing. "I don't want to knock you out. We'll call it off if you say so."

"I'll have yer heart for this!" yelled the tough, as he made a desperate lunge for Jack. But the boy captain met him full and fair, and went through his guard with a terrible right-hander to the neck.

Legree turned a half somersault and lay still on the deck. His friends rushed to pick him up.

There was silence among the Tiger Tails. The Blues cheered wildly. Hal Martin fairly hugged his young captain.

Captain Lewis and the bluejackets leaped down from the upper deck. They overwhelmed Jack with their congratulations.

Legree was soon restored to consciousness. He was, however, not disposed to resume the fight.

He retired with his company to the after part of the vessel. No more rowdy actions occurred.

Jack Clark's victory had settled the spirits of the Tiger Tails, for that time, at least.

"Well, it did me good!" cried Hal, as he wrung the hand of his young captain. "You whipped him good and hard. It was worth a year's pay to see it."

"I sized him up as being muscle-bound," said Jack. "If he had been as quick as he was strong it might have been another story."

"He can't hold it with you."

"Perhaps not; but I don't think we are done with him. If I am not mistaken, he will hold this against us. He will try to square it with me."

"Let him try it," said Hal, threateningly. "The whole company will jump on him."

At this Jack laughed.

"There wouldn't be much of him left then, would there?" he said.

But just at that moment a little launch came steaming down the Yazoo. On her deck was an officer, who, through a speaking trumpet, shouted orders to the captains of the gunboats.

These orders were to head the fleet up the river, and the gunboats got under way.

At once the fight and other matters gave way to the new developments. To all it meant that they would soon be on land, and perhaps sent at once to assail the enemy.

So the gunboats got under way slowly. Up the sluggish Yazoo they went, feeling their way, as it were, for there was danger of grounding on some mud bar or encountering a dangerous snag.

But, as the boats crept on, far off in the distance they could hear the boom of heavy guns.

"They're ready for us!" said Corporal Peters, grimly. "We'll soon have all the music around us that we want."

"That's right," agreed Lieutenant Martin. "I'm of the opinion that we are going against the toughest proposition we've struck yet."

"From the looks of the country about here I should say that was right," declared Jack Clark.

For hours the gunboats crept along through the bayous and intricacies of the muddy Yazoo.

But, finally, ahead a landing was seen. Boats were moored to the banks, and men were swarming ashore.

Soon the gunboat drew alongside, and the order came to disembark. As Jack Clark, with sharp orders, formed his men in double file, Captain Lewis came up and took his hand.

"Good luck to you, Clark!" he said. "I shall never forget how you thrashed that bully."

"Thank you!" replied Jack. "If he had been as skilful as he was strong it would have been another story."

"I believe you. I wish your company success in this fight. But I am afraid it is going to be a hard one."

"So am I," replied Jack. "But we are going to do our best, that is all."

The Blues now, in their turn, filed ashore. They were soon drawn up on the river bank. Here they waited a long time for orders.

It was tedious waiting, and it seemed as if the orders would never come. But finally an orderly came up and addressed Legree, of the Tiger Tails:

"Captain Legree, you are to fall in with Smith's division, and will march with his men to attack the foe at Haines' Bluff."

The captain of the Tiger Tails saluted.

"All right," he said. "Attention, company! Forward march!"

The Tiger Tails fell in and marched away. They were obliged to file before the Blues as they did so.

And as they passed Jack Clark their captain, Legree, glared at him and said:

"You and I will meet again. The next time there will be a different story."

"All right," said Jack, coolly. "I cannot say that I am afraid."

When the Tiger Tails had departed the orderly turned to Jack and asked:

"Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues?"

"Yes," replied Jack.

"You are ordered to report to General Morgan for scout duty. March north along the river road, and you will join General Morgan's camp."

"Very good," replied Jack. "I will endeavor to obey the order."

The young captain of the Blues immediately turned to his men and said:

"Attention, Blues! Forward march!"

The little company fell in quickly, and the march began. It was a miserable, rough road, along the edge of a quagmire, that they must follow.

The air was heavy and still. There was every indication of a fog.

The Blues passed detachments of men landing at different points along the river. It was Sherman's intention to push across to a point where the Yazoo made a bend, and then essay to cross and carry the Confederate fortifications on the bluffs beyond.

If they should succeed in doing this they could get into position to successfully attack and perhaps carry Vicksburg.

So all the troops were hurried across the narrow strip of land as rapidly as possible. The Blues were now almost at General Morgan's headquarters.

But when they arrived there Jack was surprised to learn that Morgan had left; but he had left orders with his adjutant for the future work of the Blues.

These orders were written out in detail and placed in a sealed envelope. Jack took them and, breaking the seal, read them.

He read them carefully, while Hal Martin watched him all the while.

"Well, Jack," asked the young lieutenant, finally, "what is the good word?"

The young captain drew a deep breath.

"We've got some sharp work cut out for us," he said. "Evidently General Morgan believes that we have supernatural powers."

And Jack handed the sealed orders to his young lieutenant.

CHAPTER III.

A DARING ENTERPRISE.

Hal Martin read the orders with a start of surprise.

"Will it be possible to obey them?" he asked.

"That question is not to be considered," said Jack. "We have got to obey them."

"Very good; if you give orders to do so, we will go ahead."

"I certainly shall endeavor to obey the orders given me herewith."

"That settles it," said Hal. "I will go ahead with them at once."

The Blues were ordered to march ahead once more. This time they turned their course more to the north. They did not try to follow the course of the other troops.

The orders given Jack Clark and his troops were as follows:

"March north to the upper bend of the Yazoo river. Here you will meet one of our scouts, named Weston. He will get you across the river. Then you are to scout in the rear of the enemy. Go down as near Vicksburg as you can. Learn all you can about the foe's position and numbers. Report to me as soon thereafter as you can."

(Signed) "MORGAN, General Commanding."

Jack Clark knew well enough what this meant. When Morgan signed that order he knew, or rather, believed, that the Blues would hardly come back alive. At least he did not expect to see them again.

It might seem criminal to give an order of this kind. But in war there are many stern and cruel sacrifices.

To cross the river secretly was the game. To reconnoiter the Confederate position and get all the facts possible, and escape capture as well, was another part of the game.

Certainly it seemed almost an utter impossibility. The region beyond Haines' Bluff swarmed with Confederates. The little company of Blues would certainly be easy meat for them.

But, while Jack Clark realized what a dangerous mission he was embarking upon, he was determined to make a success of it.

So, as the Blues set out with rapid tread toward the upper end of the Yazoo, they had not the least bit of fear of the consequences. Danger was something which they did not dread.

Jack had met the scout, Weston, before, and knew him well; so, altogether, the young captain felt that he had been favored with one of the most important missions of the war.

For all that, he was determined to carry it through. Soon the Blues were following a path through the canebrakes.

For some time they kept on, and finally once more saw the sluggish waters of the river before them. They also saw that the river here turned its course eastward.

"Here we are at the bend," declared Jack. "Now to find Weston."

But, even as he spoke, from a canebrake there emerged the figure of a man. He was dressed in the semi-uniform of a Confederate soldier.

"Weston!" cried Jack, stepping forward, "I am glad to see you!"

"And I am glad to see you, Captain Clark," replied the scout, as he saluted. "You have orders to meet me here?"

"I have."

"Well, orders must be obeyed, though, I must say, I would rather see some one else in this scrape."

"Why?"

"Well, I think it is a bad one. The chances are against you getting out of it alive."

"That is something a soldier must not consider," said Jack. "The chances are always against him. Death lies in wait for him continuously. But he must meet it with a brave heart."

"I have not the least doubt but that you will do that. Now, Captain, Clark, let us consider the work before us."

"I am ready."

"We must cross the river at this point."

"Yes."

"Then we will work out of the swamp and on to higher ground. There are two patrols to evade, and then we must climb Haines' Bluff, just beyond the fortifications. The real danger lies in the fact that to be discovered in any of that territory would mean certain capture or death."

"We are ready to take the chances," said Jack. "Can you lead the way?"

"I certainly will."

"But the problem is, how are we to cross the river?"

"Yes, that is the problem," said Weston; "but I think it can be done. I have secured a flatboat that will carry twenty men. Half a dozen trips back and forth ought to take the company over."

"I should say so," agreed Jack. "Where is this flatboat?"

"It is moored to the bank just below here."

"Let us get it."

"Wait a moment."

"Well?"

The scout lowered his voice and pointed to a massive oak which stood prominent among the other growth on the opposite bank.

"Do you see that big tree?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think that an outpost of the foe is stationed there. Now, if we tried boldly to cross they would see us and fire upon us. The alarm would bring several thousand of the foe to the spot."

"Then we must avoid that," cried Jack. "Is there no safer point above here to cross?"

"Above and below the river is under close watch. The foe have set traps and mines all along the river here to annihilate the Yankee gunboats. There is but one way to make the crossing safe."

Jack was interested.

"What?" he asked.

The scout lowered his voice to a whisper.

"The guard must be removed!"

Jack Clark gave a start at the calm and matter-of-fact way of the scout. His opinion of Weston was greatly enhanced at that moment. He saw that he was a brave man.

"Yes," he said; "but can it be done?"

"It can."

"How?"

Weston looked at Jack a moment in an inscrutable way. Then he asked:

"Can you swim?"

"I can," replied the young captain.

"Do you want to try the game with me?" asked the scout; "if you do not, I think I can do it alone."

In an instant Jack's eyes flashed, and he replied:

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure. I am with you."

"Very good," said the scout, with a nod. "You had better leave your lieutenant in charge of the men until we return."

So Jack called Hal Martin.

The matter was quickly explained to him.

"Weston and I intend to swim the river and dispose of a post guard on the other shore," said Jack. "I want you to hold the boys in readiness for a signal from us."

"If we dispose of the guard and find the coast clear I will signal you. Then you can launch the flatboat that you will find moored to the bank below here, and bring the men over as fast as possible. Keep on the watch for my signal."

"Very well, captain," replied the lieutenant.

"On the other hand, if you hear any sound which will satisfy you that we are in trouble, and have failed in our enterprise, you must make an attempt to cross. But if you find it impossible to do so, march back and cross below here. All I can say is that it will be left to you to carry out the orders given us by General Morgan."

Hal's eyes flashed.

"I will do my best," he said. "That will hardly be as well as you would do, but I will do my best."

"Nothing more can be asked of you," said Jack. "All right, Weston. I am ready."

Nothing was said to the rest of the Blues about Jack's project.

The young captain and the scout, accompanied by Hal Martin, crept through the canebrake down to the river bank. They quickly disrobed and placed their clothing and weapons on a floating plank.

Then they swam out into the current, pushing the plank before them. Soon they were well out in the stream.

Silently they swam for the wooded shore opposite.

It was a daring move they had embarked upon. It was a well known fact that the opposite shore was patrolled by the foe.

At any moment they might get a bullet which would put an end to the career of either; but still they kept on.

It was a long, hard swim.

At times they were obliged to rest and cling to the plank. But they kept on, and finally, after renewed exertion, they succeeded in making the opposite bank.

Jack crawled out first and pulled the plank ashore. He removed the clothing and proceeded to don his uniform.

Weston followed slowly, and proceeded to do the same. But the scout was on the alert constantly.

Silently they dressed. It looked as if, thus far, their project was bound to be a success.

"Well," whispered Jack when, finally, all dressed, they had crouched in the undergrowth, "we got across, did we not?"

"We did," replied the scout, "but every moment I was

looking for a hail from some Confederate hiding in the bushes here. The coast looks clear, though."

But, even as the whispered words passed the lips of the scout Jack put a hand on his arm, and the two sank down.

They were not a moment too soon.

The crunching of footsteps was heard, and two gray-clad Confederates suddenly emerged from the woods and came down to the very water's edge.

They were armed to the teeth. One was a heavy-featured, brutal-looking man, of middle age, who wore a colonel's shoulder-straps.

The other was a cavalry major.

"I say, Leavitt," said the colonel, "thar's no sign of the Yanks anywhere about here. They must be tryin' for a crossin' over nigher ther bluff."

"If they are, Colonel Blunt, I reckon they'll git all the music they want. Thar's a steep bluff over two hundred feet high to climb and big guns up thar to blow 'em back. I reckon Vicksburg will stop 'em."

"If it don't ther old Harry is on their side," said the colonel.

"Pemberton is rushin' men inter Vicksburg by ther car-load!"

"Oh, the Yankees will git ther worst lickin' they ever got."

"You bet your 'possums on that."

The two Confederate officers remained for some time almost within touching distance of Jack Clark and the scout. It was a thrilling experience.

They could not help but realize forcibly how fortunate they had been in having got across before the two representatives of the Confederacy had put in an appearance.

But the situation was not at all to the liking of Jack and the scout.

They felt, no doubt, that at least a regiment of infantry and a force of cavalry was near at hand. Otherwise these officers would not be there.

After some moments Colonel Blunt spoke again. What he said interested Jack greatly.

"I say, Leavitt, it's queer how Sherman got that information about our heavy batteries at Haines' Bluff! If he had only brought his fleet up here we would have blown it out of the water."

"I've thought of that myself," said Leavitt. "I reckon it was the work of that Yankee gal that has been such a favorite in all ther social events up in Vicksburg for ther last three months."

"A Yankee gal, eh? Humph! Ain't there enough pretty Southern lasses, that our young officers should be makin' fools of themselves over a Yankee petticoat?"

"Eh? She's pooty, though. I never seen so pooty a female in my life. I dunno but I might turn aside for a look at her pooty face any time."

"That's it! It's ther wimmen that turn things upside down. A man may be as level as a board on everything else, but ther woman will fool him. Do ye think that gal sent word to Sherman?"

"I sartinly do! I believe she's a Yankee spy," affirmed Leavitt.

"Well, I should think Pemberton would look that matter up. We kain't afford to have our plan spoiled, even if it is a pooty gal that does it."

"That's right. By the way, what's her name, anyway?" asked Blunt, as an after-thought.

CHAPTER IV.

A CLEVER RUSE.

"Her name?" said Leavitt, slowly. "Let me see! I believe she's called Alice Varley. Her mother was old Squire Hick's daughter. Her father was Stephen Varley, and he was killed on ther Union side at Bull Run. I reckon that's the whole story."

"How did she ever get down to Vicksburg?"

"Why, she came down here to live with her grandfather. The old squire sets his life by her. Why, she's ther belle of Vicksburg."

"And a Yankee at that!"

"Yas."

"Things are going to the dogs. Well, I don't see any use in hanging around here. I'm going back to my men and move down the river a ways."

"All right. While you're doing that I'll go up the river. We'll come back and meet here again in an hour."

"Yes."

The two Confederate officers now stole back into the undergrowth as quietly as they had come. It is hardly necessary to say that both Jack Clark and Weston drew a deep breath of relief when they had gone.

"Well," whispered Jack, as he looked at the scout, "how is that for a close call?"

"Close enough."

"They almost had us."

"So they did. It's lucky they did not happen along here about the time we were swimming the river."

"You are right, Weston. Well, we are losing time here."

"So we are," said the scout, shaking himself like a wet dog. "Let us do a little prospecting in the direction they took. I fancy their men are out here a little ways."

"If they depart it will be our opportunity to get the Blues across."

"Yes."

"Did you hear what they said about the girl spy?"

"Yes," replied Weston; "and it was all straight, too. I know her well."

"Do you?"

"I do, and she's a plucky girl, too. She has kept Sherman well informed of the work going on in Vicksburg."

"I shouldn't think it would be safe for her to remain much longer in the Confederate camp," said Jack.

"Neither will it! I reckon, though, she knows how to play her cards. She'll get out when the right time comes. She has a sweetheart on Sherman's staff, a young lieutenant, whose name is Will Allen."

"Lieutenant Allen?" cried Jack. "I know him well. He is a brave young officer."

"Yes. Well, he is her sweetheart. I hope no harm will come to her."

"So do I; but if it becomes too well known that she is a female spy it may be very dangerous for her to remain there."

Weston now led the way, and cautiously they crept after the two Confederate officers. Through the thick tangle they made their way silently.

Suddenly the tramp of horses' hoofs came to their ears. Then they saw a troop of Confederate cavalry pass at a slow trot.

When they had vanished to the north they crept on just far enough to catch a glimpse of the receding columns of a body of infantry going in the opposite direction.

It looked now as if the coast was clear.

The boy captain was about to state this as his belief, when Weston put a hand on his arm.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Look yonder."

Jack gave a start.

Under a big oak tree were three men. They were a picket guard left by the Confederate officer, Leavitt. They were trying to kindle into a blaze the coals of a fire.

As Jack gazed at them he saw at once that they were an obstacle to the success of his plans to get the Blues across the river. This picket guard must be done away with.

But how was this to be accomplished?

To draw a bead on them and shoot them down, one by one, savored too much of murder. It was a repugnant idea to the young captain.

On the other hand, to attack them in the open was to meet odds of three to two and also give them an opportunity to give the alarm.

Weston lay quite still for a time in the under brush. Finally he whispered:

"We've got to dispose of those fellows, captain."

"That's right," agreed Jack. "It looks like a hard job, though."

"It must be done. Now, I have a plan."

"What is it?"

"You will take notice that I wear a semi-Confederate uniform."

"Yes."

"It will pass as a disguise, I think. I have fooled the Johnnies a good many times. Now, I will walk up to them and make out that I am one of Forrest's men and have lost my company. See?"

"Very good. You think there is no risk of their penetrating your disguise?"

"I don't see how they can do it. At any rate, it is our best game."

"Well?"

"Now, I will win their confidence. I have a flask of whisky here and some tobacco. Now, you have no idea what a card of introduction that is."

"Yes, I have."

"Well, the beauty of it is, the whisky is drugged."

"Drugged?" exclaimed Jack, with a thrill.

"Yes; and the drug is of the kind that will enable them to have a comfortable and profound nap of several hours. By that time the Blues will have crossed the river and got far beyond the line."

Jack was thrilled with delight and triumph.

"Nothing could be better," he declared. "Weston, you are a wonder. It is now only a question of making overtures to them."

"Leave that to me. Just watch the panorama."

With this the scout arose and stepped briskly out into the open. He walked carelessly toward the guard.

They did not see him at once; but when he was seen they instantly grasped their muskets and turned upon him.

"Halt!" came the peremptory hail.

"Who are ye?"

Weston at once obeyed.

"I'm Hank Fillbrick. I'm one of Forrest's boys. Who in tarnation are you?"

The three Southerners looked at Weston critically. They saw that he wore the sort of uniform affected by Forrest's men.

He spoke with the approved Southern accent. To all appearances he was just what he claimed to be.

"Hev you got ther countersign?" one of them asked.

"In course I hain't. I don't keer nothin' about goin' through yer lines. If you'uns think I'm a spy arrest me an' take me to yer colonel. I'll show him pooty quick who I am."

"Well, it's agin orders to let any one go by here without the countersign."

"That's all right, pards. Don't think I keer for a little thing like that. I'll stay right here with ye. Have any of ye got a match?"

The three guards gave a start as they saw the scout stick a stump of a pipe in his mouth. His ruse at once caught on.

"Got any terbacker?" they cried, in one breath.

"In course I hev. Want a hunk?"

The scout tossed a plug toward them. The three sentinels grasped at it like ravenous wolves. The one who got it, though, divided it evenly.

Matches were produced, and at once the genial influences of the tobacco broke the ice. No objection was made when Weston sat down beside them.

"This ere's a tough fight, lads," he said. "I reckon we've got ther Yanks on ther hip this time, though."

"You kin bet we have," said one of the guards. "They'll hit a hard snag in Vicksburg."

"It's a good thing, for they've been humpin' us all ther way from Donelson down."

"So they hev! But Pemberton will git 'em in a trap an' wipe 'em out."

"I hope so," said Weston, sotto voce; "I say, how durned dry it makes a man ter hev ter drink bayou water, don't it?"

"Huh!" exclaimed one of the guards, "I've been spittin' cotton fer a month."

"Is thet so?" said the scout, leisurely. "Mebbe I kin

help ye out. It's only corn stuff. Ain't very nice stuff ter offer a gentleman. But I'll be glad ter drink a health with yer."

And he drew the whisky flask from his pocket. In an instant every man of the three made a lurch forward.

"Easy thar!" expostulated the scout. "Looks like you never had a taste of whisky. Take a good swig, each of ye, fer luck. Here's ter Jeff. Davis! May his shadder never increase."

So eager were the three Southerners for the much coveted liquor that they did not notice the break in the toast, but drank it vociferously.

One after another took a pull at the flask. Then they took another pull around.

"Wall, looks like ye'd make a hogshead look sick," said Weston, ruefully, when he recovered the flask with only a thimbleful in the bottom. "But it's all right, lads. I'm glad ter accommodate yer."

"I say, Fillbrick," said one of the guards, loquaciously, "you're a right smart chap, an' if all Forrest's boys are like you, ther infantry ain't a candle to ther cavalry."

"Thar's a heap o' better men than I am with Forrest now," said Weston. "But if I don't git along on my path I'll be hung fer desertin'. Good luck to ye, lads, an' speak a good word fer us poor cavalrymen."

"Hooray for Forrest's boys!" shouted one of the guards. The cheer was given. Then Weston shook hands all around and glided away.

He vanished in the undergrowth. In less than five minutes he was back with Jack Clark.

"Well," he whispered, with a chuckle, "didn't I work it well, captain?"

"I should say you did," replied Jack, with enthusiasm. "You played the part to perfection. I never saw anything better done. Ah! One of those fellows is beginning to feel the drug."

This was seen to be true.

He yawned and stretched his arms.

"I'm durned sleepy, mates," they heard him say. "I'll take a little nap. Wake me up in ten minutes."

"Humph!" exclaimed another. "I feel confounded drowsy myself. Eh? What's the matter with you, Bly? You sleepy, too? We kain't all go to sleep."

But the third guard had sat down at the foot of the tree, and with his head bowed on his knees, was instantly unconscious.

"What the deuce ails you fellows? We're all sleepy."

Then, with a hoarse cry, the fellow sprung up. Like a flash the truth came upon him.

"Hey! Wake up, you fellows! Thar's somethin' wrong hyar! We've been fooled. There was somethin' in that whisky—it's a game ter fool us—I——"

He staggered and sank down with his face in the sand. Instantly Weston sprung up.

"All right, Captain Clark!" he cried. "The coast is clear. Go down to the river and give your boys the signal. We've fooled the gang in good shape."

Jack felt like cheering, but he ran quickly down to the

river bank. In response to his signal Hal Martin appeared to view.

"All right, Hal!" cried the boy captain. "The coast is clear. Bring the boys over as fast as you can."

There was a faint cheer from the Blues. Jack saw them running along the river bank. In a short while the flatboat was pushed out into the stream.

Twenty of the boys crowded on to it. Then it was pushed out into the current.

CHAPTER V.

ON DANGEROUS GROUND.

Half a dozen times the flatboat went over and back. At last the Blues were all across the river.

The three Confederate guards were yet unconscious on the ground. The scout, Weston, only said:

"Let 'em lie there. It'll be some hours before they can make any trouble."

There was need of quick work, for at any moment the Confederates might return. So the Blues set out hastily for the interior.

Jack Clark knew little of the country beyond, but the scout, Weston, knew it like a printed book.

He knew that it would be necessary to climb high bluffs before it would be possible to get back of Vicksburg.

As the little company went on at double quick the fog, which had threatened all day, began to thicken.

The day was drawing to a close, and darkness was coming on. With the fog to aid it, this soon bid fair to be as dark as Egypt.

Jack knew that the fog would favor them in climbing the bluffs. But they must be reached before dark.

As the Blues marched quickly on the sounds of heavy firing were heard far down the Yazoo river.

Jack turned to Weston and asked:

"What do you think of that?"

"I think General Smith has reached the bluffs and is trying to cross the river," replied the scout. "If he succeeds and carries the works there much will be gained."

Soon the Blues came to higher ground. This continued to ascend until they came to a steep ascent of over two hundred feet.

This was an extension of the high ridge which the Union troops were trying to carry further down.

This part of the bluff was but lightly fortified. As the Blues silently started to climb it they encountered no resistance.

It was a hard and slippery climb, but finally all gained the summit. It was high land, and they looked about as well as they were able. The fog somewhat dimmed the distant objects.

No foe was in sight. There was no one to dispute their way.

But, despite this, the boys felt somewhat shaky. They were but a handful, well within the enemy's lines, and at any moment apt to be surrounded by an overwhelming force.

Even Weston seemed to realize this, for he said:

"I can't say that we may not fall into the hands of the foe. That is the chance taken by all raiders. But if we do enough damage in Pemberton's rear we will have gained a great deal."

"That is right," agreed Jack Clark. "We must work to that end. Let us lose no time, as I understand the Vicksburg railroad is not far from here."

"You have hit the idea," said the scout. "If we can hit the Vicksburg railroad and interfere with some supply train, or tear up the rails, it will be a thorn in the flesh of Pemberton."

Altogether, the outlook was a cheering one to the Blues.

There was a spice of danger in it all which they liked well; so they went on with renewed spirits.

Every moment now it grew darker.

They could hear the boom of guns far down the river, and they knew that Smith was making an assault. This was in the Blues' favor, as it would doubtless draw the attention of the Confederates thither.

Cautiously they pushed forward in the fog. They came presently on a well marled road.

This was the regular Vicksburg highway. Along this highway some severe fighting was to take place the next day.

Here, for a few moments, the Blues came to a halt.

Scouts were sent out to make sure that the coast was clear. It was some while before they returned.

Weston reported that a half mile further on they would come to the branch tracks of the Vicksburg railroad.

"I think we can sneak over there and rip up the rails without any trouble," he said. "Is it your orders, Captain Clark?"

"By all means!" agreed Jack.

So the Blues pushed on, crossing a desolate tract of country on their way to the railroad.

But, as they drew near to it, a distant whistle was heard, and a headlight flashed out of the gloom.

It was a train proceeding toward Vicksburg. To the surprise of the Blues, it began to slow up.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed Lieutenant Martin. "I believe they are going to stop!"

"How is that?" muttered Jack. "Is there a station here?"

"No," replied Weston. "Perhaps they are slowing up for the grade. No; on my word, they are really going to stop."

This was now seen to be a fact. The train had pulled up. Through the fog the Blues could dimly see men in gray uniforms leaping from the cars.

The commands of the officers could be heard forming them into line.

"What the deuce does it mean?" exclaimed Jack. "Are they after us?"

"No," replied the astute Weston. "I believe I see through it all. Smith is trying to flank their entrenchments, and they are rushing troops up this way to head him off. These fellows will strike for the river, mark my word."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Jack. "We are right in their path. They will be upon us!"

This seemed a certain fact.

For a moment dismay filled the hearts of the Blues. They knew that the Confederates would outnumber them twenty to one.

To be captured now, at the very beginning of their enterprise, was not a pleasant thing to contemplate.

Moreover, it was a catastrophe which the boy captain meant to avert, if it was in his power to do so.

So he instantly adopted what he believed to be the only sure way of escape. This was a rapid move to the right and across the track, just beyond the radius of the locomotive headlight.

Quickly the whispered order passed along the line, and quickly it was obeyed.

The Blues almost collided in the fog with the left guard of the Confederate line. In fact, distinctly the shout of one of the sergeants was heard:

"I say, lieutenant, it looked like something movin' off thar to the left. I could swear I saw a line of men."

"Eh?" exclaimed the Confederate lieutenant. "You're drunk, Bill Haley! Thar ain't a Yank this side of the bluff yet. Close up there, boys! Fours! Right! March!"

Away went the enemy. The Blues, skurrying away along the embankment, were soon on the other side.

It was certainly a close call.

But a miss is as good as a mile, and the Blues congratulated themselves. They felt that they had experienced a stroke of good luck.

On the other side of the track they waited for developments. Presently, however, the disembarkation was completed and the train moved on.

Hiding by the railroad track, the Blues waited until the last company of Confederates had passed from sight.

Then Jack exclaimed:

"Now is our time! Forward, boys!"

In a few moments the Blues were on the track. Their way of tearing up the track was simple enough.

A gang of twenty placed their hands beneath the ties and lifted them up bodily, throwing the twisted rails over in a heap. In a short time several hundred feet of the track had been destroyed.

This accomplished, the daring little company of raiders dashed away into the fog after new opportunities.

"They won't run any more trains into Vicksburg until that track is relaid!" cried Jack Clark. "Hello! There comes another train!"

This was a fact. The distant whistle of a locomotive was heard. The headlight loomed up in the fog. Then came the shrill shrieks of alarm from the whistle, followed by a crash as the train was derailed.

Though the Blues were some distance from the railroad now, they could plainly hear the yells and angry imprecations of the Confederate troops as they crawled out of the wreck.

The Blues waited for no more, but pushed on rapidly. Suddenly they came to a rail fence.

On the other side was a highway. It was what was known as a sunken road. That is, the roadbed had been thrown up on either side to get a good hard surface for travel. This left the surface of the road several feet below the level of the fields.

Here the Blues came to a halt.

The reason for this was the distant tramp of horses' hoofs, which came plainly to the ears of all.

It could mean but one thing, and this was that the Confederate cavalry was passing some distance ahead.

Convinced of this, Jack deployed the Blues behind the fence and waited. As the sounds had now ceased, it seemed to indicate that the foe had passed on.

"Captain Clark," said Weston the scout, in an undertone, as he now approached, "I think it would pay to reconnoiter a little before marching further."

"I believe you," agreed Jack. "Are you ready to try it?"

"Yes."

"I will accompany you. Lieutenant Martin, you may wait here until we return."

"All right, captain," agreed the lieutenant.

So Jack Clark and the scout now strode away into the deep fog. They went on cautiously. No sound of the troop could be heard, but there was no doubt that they could not be far away.

For several hundred yards the two kept on. Then Weston came to a sudden halt.

"Down!" he whispered. "We are lost if they see us! They are close upon us!"

A slight thicket overhung a little hollow. Into this the two crouched. They were not a moment too soon.

Out of the gloom came a line of Confederate infantry with trailing arms and advancing on the double quick.

CHAPTER VI.

A FAIR PROPOSITION.

The position of Jack Clark and Weston the scout was sufficiently dangerous and thrilling.

When it was considered that they were directly in the path of the infantry, this could be fairly well realized. Only the thicket might keep them from being trod upon.

On came the Confederate column at the double quick. Truly, the region seemed to be alive with the foe.

"We are lost!" whispered Jack. "They cannot help but discover us."

"Don't give up yet," replied the scout. "If they divide, instead of plunging through the thicket, we may escape."

This was the one chance.

Certainly it was a precarious one. On came the line. Now the first line passed, the column dividing to avoid entering the bushes.

The gleam of their bayonets smote upon the gaze of the two hiding men. Their swarthy, set countenances could be seen, and every detail of their uniforms.

Jack and Weston were right in the midst of the surging column. It did not seem that they could possibly avoid being discovered.

They were but scantily covered by the bushes. But the fog, and the fact that the gaze of the Confederates was generally before them, had thus far been their salvation.

But suddenly, as the column began to grow more solid, two lines surged against each other. There was no help for it but to plunge into the thicket.

One man stepped on Weston's back and, stumbling, fell. Another went over him, and a yell of discovery went up.

Jack and the scout knew that all was up. They were discovered.

In an instant they were upon their feet. Both were ready for any desperate opening that might offer itself for escape.

But there was none.

They were completely surrounded by the foe. A wild shout went up from them.

"What's the matter thar?"

"Holy smoke! It's a couple of Yanks!"

"Hold 'em up!"

But neither Jack nor Weston made any attempt to escape. They held up their hands in token of surrender.

In an instant they were disarmed, and the colonel of the regiment in whose midst they were confronted them.

"Who are ye?" he demanded.

There was no use in evading the issue.

"You've got us, colonel," said Jack, blandly. "I'm Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. This is Weston, one of our scouts. I hope you will treat us as prisoners of war."

"I see. Well, my fine fellows, we'll see that you don't carry any word back to Sherman. Here, sergeant, detail a guard for these prisoners. Send 'em over to the railroad, to be deported to the rear."

The sergeant and guard detailed to take charge of them now separated themselves from the Confederate column.

They marched the prisoners away into the fog. For a moment Jack was thrilled with the joyful fact that they were being marched in the direction of the Blues.

But a few yards further on the sergeant swerved to the right and skirted a grove of trees. This left the Blues far to the south, and now the two prisoners realized that if they were to escape they must at once use their wits to that end.

The guard numbered nine men besides the sergeant.

The prisoners were not bound, but they were kept in the center of the file. A couple of soldiers marched behind them with bayonets pressed to their backs.

Escape under such circumstances was far from possible. Every sort of a ruse was considered by the astute Weston.

But nothing plausible seemed to suggest itself.

For half an hour they marched on. No word was spoken, save occasionally a curt order from the lips of the sergeant.

Suddenly out of the fog a light flashed. For an instant Jack thought it might be the flash of another locomotive headlight.

But he quickly saw that this was not so. The sergeant halted the guard and held a low-toned conversation with one of the men.

Then they went on slowly. Suddenly it was seen that the light emanated from the window of a cabin just ahead.

The sergeant now approached the cabin with quick step. A few moments later the guard drew up before its door. There was no sign of human being about the place.

But the sergeant rapped loudly on the door with the hilt of his sword. Several times he rapped.

Then the door opened a crack, and a frightened black face appeared.

"Fo' massy's sakes, gemmen, don' go fo' to harm a po' ole black lady dat don' do no harm to nobody."

Derisive laughter went up from the Confederate guard.

"Open the door, Aunt Chloe!" cried the sergeant. "We will spare your life if you'll make us some hot cakes. We are as hungry as ever, you see."

Tremblingly the black mammy opened the door. The Confederates, with the prisoners, went trooping in.

The one room of the cabin was large and cheery and, though it had but little furniture, it was as neat as wax.

The Confederate soldiers had told the truth when they said that they were hungry. They threw themselves down upon the floor in various attitudes of ease, while the old black woman, in nervous fear, proceeded to cook for them.

"Well, Sergeant Frisbie," cried one of the guard, a well set-up young Mississippian, "I'd jest as soon be here as trampin' over to the Yazoo with ther rest of ther boys. What do ye think?"

"Wall, you kin bet," replied the sergeant. "I ain't much pleased with this war, nohow. I reckon, though, that when Pemberton gits through with Sherman he'll just go back to old Lincoln and resign his commission."

"An' ther South will get her freedom."

"Thet's right."

The black woman had now begun to turn out the hoe cakes, cooked as only a black mammy can cook them. There was a wild scramble for them.

Gaining confidence, she brought out a couple of hams and sliced them up. Also, she put on a kettle and warmed up some coffee.

It is hardly necessary to say that this was a kingly feast for the half-starved soldiers, who had seen nothing better than hardtack and salt pork for many days.

They were generous enough to offer the same to the prisoners.

Jack and Weston were nothing loth to take the food. They were hungry themselves. As the Confederate soldiers felt the gratifying effect of the hot coffee they seemed to develop genial spirits.

They began to discuss matters of various sorts, and finally got to telling stories. The sergeant seemed to be the best hand at this, and cracked a number of good jokes, which made everybody laugh.

Then a cry went up:

"Every man tell a story! Every man in his turn!"

This was a good suggestion, and was at once acted upon. One after another told as funny a yarn as he could.

Jack and Weston were interested listeners. They found that these fellows among whom they were thrown were of a type not common in the Confederate army, where most of the soldiers took a serious view of the war.

All the while they had been trying to devise some practical plan of escape. This had not yet seemed possible.

When the last man had told his story Frisbie turned, and his gaze rested upon the prisoners.

"Hello!" he cried. "Why not take these chaps in? Tell us a story, boys! See if you Yanks kin beat us at it."

In an instant Jack grasped the situation. His quick wit now stood him in good stead.

"All right, Johnny," he said, with perfect sang froid. "I'll make a bargain with you. If we don't tell a better story than you, we'll give you all the money we've got. If we do tell a better story you'll give us a chance to get out of the door and cut for it."

For an instant there was silence. The sergeant and his men did not seem at once to grasp the idea.

"Do you understand me?" asked the boy captain.

"Can't do it, Yank. We're responsible for ye to our colonel."

"Pshaw! Your colonel will never see us after we leave your hands. When your provost marshal takes charge of us, that is the end. Now, our capture can't affect the war a penny's worth."

"That's right, Frisbie!" cried one of the guard. "Let's take him up on it. They can't beat you tellin' a yarn, anyway."

This was flattery, but it tickled the vanity of the sergeant, and he nodded.

"I kain't do jest that," he said. "But I'll tell ye what we will do. We'll tell the stories, an' then we'll have a wrestlin' an' fencin' match arterward. If ye kin beat us at them things, ye kin walk out of this here place an' we won't lift a finger."

For a moment there was silence. Then one of the guard exclaimed:

"Thet ain't hardly fair, Frisbie! Ye don't give 'em no chance at all."

"Excuse me," said Jack, quietly. "Do you mean that we must wrestle and fence every one of you in turn? That would be a physical impossibility."

Frisbie hesitated a moment.

"I s'pose it would," he said.

"I've got it," cried one of the guard. "Let us pick out our best men and let them draw lots, one for wrestlin' an' one for fencin'. We've got jest two swords among us. Ye prisoners kin decide which kin wrestle and which will fence."

"That's right," chorused the others. "Give the Yanks a fair chance."

In an instant the boy captain cried:

"We accept. I will fence your best man, and my comrade will wrestle. That is fair play. We are ready for the fun at any time."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GIRL SPY APPEARS.

It was possible that Sergeant Frisbie, on second thought, might have objected to the scheme.

But the others were unanimous in their desire to carry out the project. They were impelled by the love of sport and an inborn confidence that they were superior in all departments to the despised Yankees.

So the bargain was made.

Jack gave Weston a comprehensive glance. He knew the scout was an expert wrestler, but the latter whispered:

"Do ye feel sure, Clark? You know, these Southerners kin use a sword well."

"I'll take chances," said Jack. "We can't be any worse off if we fail."

"That's true."

The story-telling was the first test. It was for Weston to lead off. The scout had a dry wit, peculiar to his Yankee training, and he told one that kept his hearers convulsed.

Then it was Jack's turn. The boy captain did himself proud. In his best manner, he reeled off a yarn that so tickled the risibilities of his hearers that they were completely overcome.

The decision was unanimous. It was plain that the Confederate guard were going to yield fair play.

"You win!" cried Frisbie, springing to his feet. "Now for ther final test. Ye kin tell stories, but ye can't beat us at the leetle game that's comin'."

"If we beat you, we can be assured you will keep your word?" asked Jack.

"You kin bank on that."

The guards now proceeded to draw lots. Their best men were named and the lots were drawn.

As it happened, Jack drew Frisbie for his opponent. Weston drew a stocky Tennessean named Walbridge for his.

It was decided to hold the sword play first. The two swords were produced and tested.

They were common cavalry sabres, and it required a strong wrist to handle them. Frisbie was a much heavier and larger man than the boy captain.

But Jack felt no fear. It was not his way to shrink from a combat.

Interest was now at fever height. The scene in the little cabin was a striking one.

Light was furnished by an oil lamp against the wall and also by the blaze from the fire on the hearth. Darkness had shut down outside.

The group of Confederate soldiers ranged around the room made a picturesque spectacle. The old black mammy was crouched in the corner of the fire place, watching the scene half in fear.

At the lower end of the room a curtain hung diagonally across a corner. It presumably concealed a bed. No one had as yet taken the pains to look behind it.

Frisbie stepped to the center of the room and placed the point of his blade in the floor.

"I'm ready, Yank," he said. "Now, I don't intend to kill ye. I jest mean to show ye that I could kill ye if I chose to."

"Very considerate," replied Jack. "I will also say that I do not mean to take your life, but simply to show you that I am your superior with the sword."

Frisbie grinned, and asked:

"Do ye think ye kin do that?"

"I certainly do."

"Wall, if ye kin ye're a good one."

"I claim to be such."

"All right! Stand guard!"

Jack whirled his sabre up, and the blade crossed that of the Confederate. Then the play began.

It was a fascinating spectacle. Up and down, in and out, flashed the blades. It seemed hard to follow them, so swiftly did they move.

But Jack found quickly that his man was by no means invincible. He found that he could hold him well.

In fact, before many moments he became convinced that the game was his.

Frisbie was more powerful.

His wrist was of steel. But he was much slower than his antagonist. It was possible for Jack to get in two blows to his one.

The other Confederates watched the contest with most intense interest. They shouted with triumph whenever Frisbie made a good play.

But they were equally generous when Jack showed up best. And so the contest went on.

But it could not go on forever.

It would end one way or the other before long.

And it came to an end in a most unexpected manner. Frisbie made a tremendous blow at the boy captain, but Jack caught the blade and turned it aside deftly.

In that instant it parted at the hilt and went clanging to the floor.

Frisbie, with only the hilt in his hand, stood aghast before his opponent. Jack at once lowered the point of his sword.

"Too bad!" he said. "You have had an accident."

"You win!" said the Confederate sergeant.

"No," replied Jack, quickly. "I cannot claim victory on such a pretence. The blade was defective. Get another and we will go on with the bout."

"Ah, but that is where ye beat me," said Frisbie, in a disappointed way. "Thar is no other sword to be had."

Jack saw the point. He took his own weapon by the blade and extended it to the sergeant.

"Then the game is off," he said, courteously. "I am very sorry, for I do not think the question was decided as to which was the better swordsman."

Frisbie scratched his head.

"Ye're ther squarest Yank I ever met," he said. "But I'll tell yer ther truth. I believe ye're a little bit better than I am."

"Yet the contest was not finished."

"I'm durned sorry, for I'd like to have it out with ye some time. Mebbe it'll come our way some day. But we'll call you ther winner."

"You are very generous."

"Wall, I'll leave it to ther rest of ther boys. What do ye say, lads?"

At once the others chorused:

"We think' the Yank wins."

This did not seem to nettle Frisbie at all. With a wave of his hand, he said:

"Thar ye are! I hope ye are satisfied."

"I certainly am," replied Jack, with a thrill of pleasure.

"We are certainly getting fair play."

"That's what ye allus get here," declared Frisbie. "Shake hands an' call it quits. Now fer ther wrestlin' match."

Walbridge, the big Tennessean, pulled off his coat and stripped to the waist. He had tremendous muscles, and Jack felt some misgivings when Weston stepped out, for the scout was not anywhere near so well endowed.

But Weston only smiled, and seemed as cool as ice.

The two wrestlers faced each other for a moment in the center of the cabin, each watching warily for a chance to get a hold.

It came to Walbridge first.

He launched his huge bulk forward and caught Weston about the middle. But even as he strained himself to force the scout over backward Weston drew his elbow across the giant's throat and, gripping his thigh with the other hand, drew him to an even closer embrace.

The result was that Walbridge's neck would have been broken had he persisted in that hold.

So he relaxed his grip and fell back for another.

But even as he did so Weston, quick as a flash, threw his left arm across his antagonist's hip and in some dextrous manner caught him off his balance and brought him to the floor.

It was a fair fall, and there could be no evasion. A mighty yell went up from the Confederate spectators.

"The Yank wins! Hooray! He's a good one! It's all up with ye, Walbridge! Ye're no good!"

For a moment the Tennessean was angry. He could hardly realize his defeat.

"That was a fluke!" he yelled. "Ye've got ter give me another chance!"

He rushed at Weston like a bull, but the scout deftly stepped aside and, catching the giant by the hips while he was yet in the air, flung him aside like a limp rag.

Walbridge turned a somersault and rolled into the curtain which screened the corner of the room.

The result was startling beyond description. Down came the curtain, and there was a thrilling revelation.

Standing against the rough wall of the cabin was the figure of a young girl.

Beautiful as a dream she was as she stood there. She was dressed plainly, yet neatly, and her manner was calm and courageous.

Amazed beyond expression, the Confederate guard stared at her.

Then a gasping cry escaped Frisbie:

"Holy smoke! It's ther belle of Vicksburg! It's ther Union gal spy!"

The announcement was repeated by the others. For a moment the excitement was most intense.

Jack Clark and Weston the scout were more than ordinarily interested.

So this was Alice Varley, the girl spy and the belle of the Southern city. A belle, despite the fact that she was a Northern girl with Union prejudices.

Frisbie stood staring at the girl spy for some moments. She very calmly stepped forward.

"You know me?" she said, quietly.

"Yes," replied Frisbie. "I know that Pemberton has ordered us to arrest ye on sight."

"Ah! I can make no terms with you?"

"Only that ye will go with us to General Pemberton's headquarters."

"That I decline to do."

"Sorry, miss, but I reckon we'll have to take ye."

"What are you going to do with those prisoners? Will you set them free?" she asked.

Frisbie hesitated a moment. Then he made reply ruefully:

"Both of 'em beat us. I reckon we'll have to do it."

"That is all right," said the girl spy. "I will remain your prisoner. But you will pardon me when I say that it will not be for long."

"Eh?" exclaimed Frisbie. "That will depend upon General Pemberton."

"You are wrong. It will depend upon my own faithful guard, which will soon be here. Ah! Do you hear that?"

The sound of a bugle broke the stillness outside. The latter of which was heard, and the Confederate guard sprang to its feet and grasped their muskets.

It was a critical moment.

The door of the cabin flew open, and an officer in Union blue sprang in. Behind him was a legion of blue bayonets. They were present for no light purpose.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOST IN THE FOG.

The moment that Jack Clark saw the blue uniforms he seemed to feel that fate had placed all in his hands. A few moments before all had been against him.

Doubtless Frisbie would have stood by his agreement and given the prisoners their liberty. But this was not all.

They stood a good show of being recaptured at any moment. Without comrades they could have made but little resistance in case they had been overtaken again. And it was hardly likely that they would again find such generous captors as Frisbie and his men.

For a moment Frisbie seemed disposed to make resistance.

But, with all his bravery, he was not rash or foolish. It was easy for him to see that it was useless.

"You see," said the girl spy, triumphantly, "it is folly for you to resist."

The Confederate sergeant made a low bow.

"You are right, miss," he said. "We surrender. But I'd like to ask if all Yankee gals are like you."

"I am but a poor representative of my sex," she replied. "Kindly disarm these men, Lieutenant Fox."

Then she turned to Jack and Weston.

"Gentlemen," she said, in a polite manner, "I have not had the honor of meeting you before. But I have heard of your company and its brave work, Captain Clark."

"And I have heard of your fame, Miss Varley," replied Jack. "I am deeply honored to meet you."

"Well said. Now, captain, tell me how you came to fall into the hands of these men."

"It is a simple story," replied Jack. "We were detailed by General Morgan to do some scouting in the rear of Vicksburg. We got across the river all right, and succeeded in tearing up a section of the railroad. Our scout, Mr. Weston, and myself then went ahead a few hundred yards to reconnoiter. We were surrounded by a detachment and made prisoners. You know the rest."

"And your company is somewhere about here in waiting for your return?"

"Yes."

"Well," she said, decisively, "I think we can assist you to find them. But it is my advice to you to return and report to General Morgan at once. You can only jeopardize your company by going further. It will soon be impossible for you to return."

"Do you believe that?"

"I know it absolutely. Within the week General Sherman will be compelled to fall back. His campaign is destined to become a failure."

Jack was astounded, and incredulity shone in his eyes. She smiled and went on:

"I know you are not disposed to believe that. But it is the absolute truth. It will take a much heavier force than a different line of attack to capture Vicksburg."

"You may be right," said Jack. "But our army has swept away everything thus far."

"Very true! But that does not indicate that a halt may not be called at any moment."

"That is right."

"Now, I am going to retreat with my bodyguard to the west of this place. Then, in disguise, I am going back into the city of Vicksburg. I shall do important work there."

"Very good," agreed Jack. "I wish you much success. But if you can direct us where to find our company we will be very grateful."

"I can do so," said the girl spy. "I will send a guard with you. Now do not fail to comply with my advice."

"One word more!"

"Well?"

"What do you intend to do with these poor fellows you have captured?"

Alice Varley gazed at the Confederate prisoners.

"Send them to Sherman," she said. "They will be sent to the rear as prisoners of war."

"If you can reconsider that decision you will confer a great favor upon me."

"In what manner, may I ask?"

"They were singularly generous with me. I would ask that they be treated accordingly."

"The best I can do is to accept their parole."

Jack turned to the prisoners.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am deeply conscious of your very kind treatment of myself and my companion. I am anxious to reciprocate, and I have prevailed upon Miss Varley to accept your parole. Are you willing to accept?"

Frisbie and his men looked at each other.

"That means that we kain't go back into ther army to fight, don't it?"

"You pledge your word never again to take up arms against the Union."

"Well," said Frisbie, slowly, "I don't believe we kin accept. I don't blame ye, captain; an' don't feel that ye've got to put yourselves out at all for us. We'll go along as prisoners of war and take our chances on an exchange."

So the question was settled. Jack and Weston shook hands with their erstwhile captors.

Then Alice Varley, the girl spy, true to her promise, detailed a guard to escort Jack and Weston back to the place where they had left the Blues.

"I hope to see you again, gentlemen," said the girl spy, saluting them.

"We are grateful to you for kind favors," replied Jack.

"I would like to ask you a question."

"Well?"

"Do you know Lieutenant Will Allen, of General Sherman's staff?"

"I know him well," replied Jack. "He is one of the best young officers in the service."

The girl spy's face crimsoned. She lowered her voice and said:

"As a favor to me, would you give him this?"

She placed a note in Jack's hand. The young captain understood, and he placed the message quickly in the bosom of his blouse.

The two released prisoners, with their guide, now left the cabin. The darkness and fog was most intense.

Jack knew that it would have been impossible for him to have found his way back to the Blues. But the guard detailed as guide seemed to have no trouble whatever.

Quickly he led the way through the darkness, and finally they came into a sunken road. In an instant Jack knew that it was in a road like this that the Blues had been left.

The guide halted and said:

"Follow the road that way, captain. You'll find your men, all right."

It is hardly necessary to say that Jack was delighted. With Weston he started down the road rapidly. The guide now vanished in the darkness.

The two ran on rapidly.

Suddenly they heard the rattle of a musket, and a sharp hail rose on the air.

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Friends!" replied Jack, quickly. "Is that you, Carter?"

A cry of joy went up from the picket.

"Captain Clark, back safe and sound," he cried. "This is good news. We thought you had been captured."

"We were," replied Jack, "but, by the best of good luck, we are back again."

"And glad to get back!" cried Weston.

In a moment Jack and the scout were among their comrades. It is hardly necessary to say that it was a joyful meeting.

"We had given you up," declared Hal Martin. "I was half tempted to go in quest of you myself."

"It is a very fortunate thing that you did not," said Jack.

"Well, captain, what is the order?" asked the young lieutenant. "Shall we go ahead?"

"We were advised to go back," said Jack. "But I can't share the pessimistic views of the female spy. Can you, Weston?"

"I really can't," replied the scout.

"That settles it!" said the young captain. "We will go ahead."

This decision led to some thrilling developments. The Blues silently fell into line in the darkness and started down the sunken road.

Both Jack and Weston believed that they took exactly an opposite course from the one they had taken in coming from the cabin.

It was their belief that the sunken road led toward Vicksburg. They intended to follow it some distance as an experiment.

For a long time they kept on.

The road seemed to have no ending. There was the interminable rail fence. Finally Jack consulted his watch.

They had been traveling an hour, and still keeping in the same sunken road.

Now he called a halt.

"Where are we going?" he asked, in a puzzled way. "Surely Vicksburg was but a few miles from where we started. Have we been going the wrong way?"

"It looks like it," said Weston. "Do you suppose we got turned around in the fog and went in the opposite direction?"

"Horrible!" exclaimed the boy captain. "We have lost valuable time."

"So it would seem."

But just then a startling thing occurred. The gloom ahead was broken by a distant vivid glare like lightning. Then a dull boom succeeded.

It was the explosion of a heavy gun. It was soon followed by another.

The shells went shrieking away in the distance over the heads of the Blues. But one conclusion could be formed.

"We are on the right track," decided Weston. "Those shells came from Vicksburg. The fortifications, doubtless,

are sending shells over the river to make the advance of the gunboats unsafe."

"In that case we had better not venture nearer at present," said Jack.

"I should think not. It seems that we can accomplish little in this heavy fog and darkness."

"What shall we do?"

"I advise a bivouac and wait for the early morning light."

"It seems our only plan," agreed Jack.

So the Blues at once threw themselves down on their blankets, only too glad to accept the chance for much-needed rest.

Pickets were posted, and so they proceeded to wait for morning. Jack and Weston were much fatigued and also glad to seek a few hours of slumber.

Jack Clark was awakened by a touch on his arm.

He sprang up to face Hal Martin. The young lieutenant's face was anxious.

"I have heard voices near here," he said. "I think we ought to investigate, for the foe may come down on us at any moment."

Jack sprang to his feet.

Thick, impenetrable fog prevented seeing any considerable distance. As he rose he saw that Weston was already astir.

The scout approached Jack and the young lieutenant.

"Captain Clark," he said, "if I were you I would make a little reconnaissance down the road yonder."

"It shall be done!" said Jack. "Detail three men to go with us, Hal."

"All right, captain."

Quickly three of the privates were detailed. Jack and Weston led the way down the road. As they went on, the road, curiously enough, seemed to descend.

"What is this?" exclaimed Jack. "It looks to me as if we were going into low, boggy land. Vicksburg is situated on high bluffs."

"It is queer," admitted Weston. "But we'll soon know the truth."

CHAPTER IX.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

The scout's words were prophetic. They did soon know the truth.

The fog seemed to grow lighter and lift. The morning breeze blew it away in patches.

And as it did so a startling scene was revealed. The gleam of water was seen just ahead.

"Where are we?"

As if in answer to the boy captain's query, a great section of fog lifted. As by magic, a thrilling scene was revealed.

The river in its widest part lay before them. Just across was a point of land.

A half mile above was moored a gunboat. It was its

guns shelling the Confederates that they had seen a few hours before.

Dumbfounded, Jack and the scout stood gazing upon the scene. Finally the boy captain said:

"How easily we were deceived. We have simply come back to the river. Yet, it is not the point where we crossed."

"No," replied the scout. "Hello! Somebody has come ashore here. Look at the boat down there!"

This was seen to be the truth. A rowboat was drawn up on the shore.

No sign of the Confederates was to be seen. A shade of disappointment crept across Jack Clark's face.

"Hang the luck!" he exclaimed. "This don't suit me, Weston. I thought we would be near enough to Vicksburg this morning to accomplish something."

"Perhaps a kind Providence designed it otherwise," said the scout. "We might all have been prisoners before this."

"True enough!" agreed the boy captain, philosophically. "Perhaps that is the best way to look at it."

Then they gave a start. An astonishing thing happened. From behind a tree which overhung the water's edge there stepped a female figure.

It was the girl spy, Alice Varley.

She was beckoning them excitedly. At once Jack ran toward her. The girl spy was pale and excited.

"Ah, a kind fate has brought you here!" she cried. "Is your company near by?"

"Over the bluff yonder," replied Jack.

"Excellent. I want to tell you that in a few moments we shall be able to intercept valuable despatches which are intended for General Johnson. The capture of them may defeat an attempt to attack Sherman's rear."

"We are at your service, Miss Varley," declared Jack.

"Good! Now, I want to inform you, also, that they will be carried by two boys, who have been deemed a safer medium than any other. This is their boat, with which they will cross the river."

"They will never cross it," declared Jack. "You can depend on that. Miss Varley, we will intercept them."

"That is what I want. Now, I will advise you to hide in the cover of the trees yonder. Wait until the boys appear on the river bank. Then surround them."

Jack ordered his men back into the cover of the trees, as Miss Varley had advised. She went back to her covert behind the tree on the point.

Ten minutes slowly dragged by. Then voices were heard on the bluff above.

Carelessly sauntering down the road were a couple of boys. They were seemingly of the ordinary type and above suspicion of being despatch bearers.

Jack waited until they had turned to go down to the water's edge. Then he arose, with pistol in hand, and shouted:

"Halt! You are prisoners! I will fire if you attempt to escape!"

At the same moment Alice Varley appeared from behind the tree. The boys seemed to recognize her at once, and gave a yell of alarm.

Jack could have shot them, but he only shouted to his men:

"After them, boys! Don't let them reach the boat!"

The Blues sprung forward like deer.

It was an exciting race. The two boys reached the boat first, and one turned to shake his fist at the girl spy, when three of the Boys in Blue leaped into the water.

So wild was their rush that the boat was swamped.

The two young despatch bearers were spilled into the river. One of them tried to dive and swim away.

But the Blues grabbed him and hauled him ashore. The capture was complete.

Miss Varley now stepped forward and said, sharply:

"Take off the boy's jacket. The papers are sewed in the lining."

There were the papers, as the girl spy had said. They were taken out and examined. The two lads now were terribly frightened and began to beg piteously for their lives.

For they thought sure that the Yankees would kill them. Jack, however, only said:

"I ought to send you to the bottom of the river. But, considering your extreme youth, I shall hold you as prisoners and deliver you up to the provost marshal."

Just then a cry went up from one of the Blues. There was seen at once to be good reason for alarm.

Confederate soldiers had appeared at a point on the river bank half a mile below. Their gray uniforms could plainly be seen, and they were coming toward the Blues.

"There are the Confederates!" cried Weston. "I think we had better return to the company at once, Captain Clark."

"So do I," agreed the young captain. "But, what about these despatches? They ought to be taken to General Sherman at once."

"Give them to me," said the girl spy. "I will see that they are delivered."

"You?" exclaimed Jack.

"Yes; have no fear," replied the girl spy. "I shall take the rowboat and pull for the ironclad yonder. It will be easy enough then to send the despatches to General Sherman."

"A clever idea!" cried Weston. "We can do nothing with them now, Clark. I advise you to let her have them."

"They are yours!" cried Jack. "And I wish you luck, Miss Varley. I hope we shall meet again."

"I hope so, captain," replied the brave young girl, "and at that time that Vicksburg will have fallen."

She sprung into the boat and pushed off. Soon, with skilful strokes, she was pulling away across the river toward the gunboat.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the scout. "That is a smart young girl, Clark."

"You are right," agreed Jack. "If we had more like her in the service the war would be short."

"I believe you!"

But it was now necessary to make quick action. The

Confederate river guards, for such they undoubtedly were, had drawn nearer.

If they should see the little party it might precipitate serious consequences.

So Jack at once gave the order to fall back and join the Blues.

Soon they had reached the summit of the bluff. The fog had now cleared away, so that they could see all about quite clearly.

From this high point they could look far down the river.

There had been desperate fighting by Smith's corps at the crossing far below. Many brave soldiers had lost their lives in the attempt to carry the bluff.

The distant fortifications of Vicksburg could be seen. Great guns were mounted, tier upon tier, along the heights.

Impressed with the scene, Jack Clark declared:

"On my word, Weston, I am afraid we will never be able to carry those works. I don't believe Sherman will attempt it."

The scout shook his head.

"Nor I," he replied. "It is my opinion that Vicksburg's only vulnerable point is below or down the river."

"That can only be reached by a tremendously long detour."

"Unless the gunboats should succeed in running the batteries."

"I fear that can never be done," said Jack Clark. "Such a fire could be concentrated upon them at close range as would sink them like tubs."

The scout shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish Grant was here," he said. "I think you would see something done."

But the Blues now fell back along the sanken road. They knew that it would be safer to draw back from the river.

But Jack Clark was now uncertain what to do. He felt that he had accomplished about all that was possible without actually sacrificing his little company.

And this would be folly; so he quickly decided upon a change of plan.

"Halt!" he said, consulting Lieutenant Martin. "I think we will fall back across the Yazoo and report to General Morgan."

The young lieutenant gave a start.

"Do you think that is our best plan?"

"I do."

"Shall I proceed accordingly?"

"Yes. Give the order at once to march along the bluff. I think we can dodge those river guards and safely reach the point where we crossed."

CHAPTER X.

HOFLY PURSUED.

To go back across the Yazoo Jack Clark believed was his best and safest plan.

His scouting trip had been a success. They had learned important facts, had damaged the railroad and captured despatches. Every moment the possibility of being entrapped by the foe increased.

To return now and report to General Morgan seemed to be the best plan.

So the Blues cautiously marched along the base of the bluffs toward the bend in the Yazoo where they had left the flatboat.

They succeeded in evading the river guards below. After an hour's hard marching they reached the spot where they had ascended the bluff.

It was fortunate that trees here screened them, for the Confederate batteries were not far away, and they might have been seen and have drawn their fire.

Cautiously the little company of soldiers descended the bluff to the water's edge. The flatboat was still moored to the bank where they had left it.

So at once the embarkation was begun. It was no easy matter, however, to pole the heavy flatboat across and back for nearly a dozen trips to accomplish the task.

The boat had opened a scum and had begun to leak badly. It looked as if it would not last to carry all across.

But all but a dozen of the Blues had safely crossed, and the flatboat was returning for Jack, Weston and ten of the privates, when a startling alarm appeared.

There was a distant boom, and a shell struck the water just under the flatboat's stern. The cannon in some of the Confederate batteries below had sighted the boat and were making a target of it.

The shells began to plump into the river all about the flatboat.

"By jingo!" cried the scout. "They are going to sink her, Jack."

"It looks like it," replied the boy captain. "We are in a tight box, Weston. It will be too hot for us here pretty quick. How will we be able to get out of here?"

The scout's face showed his anxiety.

But his ready wit was quickly brought into play. He glanced back at the bluff and saw the glint of bayonets.

"Great guns!" he cried. "They are coming after us! We have got to get out of here."

This was seen to be the truth. To waste time would be fatal. Quick action was made.

The ten privates responded quickly to Jack's orders to fall in and follow the scout. Along the river bank they ran.

Bullets whistled after them. Once Jack looked back, to see that the flatboat had gone down.

The two soldiers who had been poling it were swimming for the farther shore. Jack was gratified to see that, in spite of the storm of shell sent after them, they succeeded in getting across.

By this time Weston, leading the way, had gained the dense canebrake.

Into it he plunged, followed by Jack and the ten Blues. Once in the cover of the cane, they lay on, until finally the sounds of pursuit died out. For the nonce they seemed safe.

But they were in the midst of the swamp, and it was no easy matter to become absolutely lost. This was something which none could relish.

The swamp was a perfect picture of the general characteristics of a Southern swamp, large holes and hummocks and masses of cypress, some which lurked turtles, and snakes of the copperhead variety.

There was the deadly danger of being bitten by one of these reptiles at any time. The Northern boys could not but view such a possibility with horror.

"Go!" exclaimed Private Jim Furber. "I can't say I like this sort of thing. I'd rather be cut loose in a Northern blizzard without an overcoat. The chill I get wouldn't be half so bad."

The other boys laughed, and for a time all forgot their troubles. Just then Weston, who had been in advance, led them on to a sort of sand hummock, or little island, in the middle of the swamp.

Here a few pine trees grew, and it was high and dry.

Exhausted, the boys cast themselves down to rest. They lay panting on the sands, and for a time felt secure.

Far off in the distance the roar of the Confederate batteries could be heard. It was evident that heavy fighting was still going on along the banks of the Yazoo.

"I hope our boys are winning," said Private Furber, as he pulled a loaf of bread out of his haversack and began to munch it.

"So do I," cried Private Foster. "If we win the Johnnies' leader it ought to lead toward ending the war."

"I wish it was ended," said another of the Blues. "I'd like to go home and get one of mother's good square meals."

At this all gave a chorus of assent. Jack Clark and Weston, near by, laughed heartily.

"Vicksburg will fall," said Weston, "but it won't end the war."

Just then Private Furber leaped to his feet and leveled his musket at some live oak scrub a little ways distant.

"Come out of that, you black scoundrel!" he shouted.

"Come out and show yourself!"

Out of the live oak scrub crept a black man. He was dressed as the field hands of the South usually dressed in those days.

He crept forward, half in terror, at Furber's command. It could be seen that he was a fugitive slave.

Jack arose and addressed the colored man.

"Well, sir," he asked, "who are you?"

Tremblingly the black replied:

"Ise only old Jason, sah! Ise old Marse Jones' nigger. I am gwine fo' to do no harm, sah! Ise an honest nigger."

"I hope so," said Jack, tersely. "Where does your master live?"

"Jes' over beyond de swamp, sah. He am a planter an' about de richest about heah, sah! Nearly everybody knows Marse Clay Jones."

"Clay Jones!" exclaimed Weston. "He is one of the pillars of the Confederacy in this part of the state. I know him well by reputation. See here, Jason! Is your master at home at present?"

"I don't know, sah."

"Where are you doing out here in the swamp?"

"Ise run away, sah! Near a lot nigger on de plantation ran away. Dey done want dere freedom."

"Ah, I see! Well, if your master should catch you now he'd hang you up by the thumbs."

"I know dat, sah. But he aint a goin to catch dis chile, less he gits de bloodhounds after me. I lin lib in de swamp heah fo' de rest ob mah life."

"Captain Clark," said Weston, "I have an idea. It is plain that we cannot rejoin the Blues for some time. It won't be safe to go back to the Yazoo right away. Now, it's possible that we might get some important news at Clay Jones' house. For that matter, some of the Confederate officers or spies may be around there. Suppose we pay the place a visit and do some investigating?"

The idea struck Jack favorably.

"It shall be done!" he cried. "Jason shall lead us there, and we shall gain the double end of getting out of the swamp also."

The negro was exceedingly willing to act as guide. So the plan was adopted.

Jason led the way into the swamp. The little company of Union soldiers followed him.

For a time they floundered in bog-holes, climbed over cypress roots, and finally came out into a path, which soon led them into the open country. They emerged from the swamp to see rice fields and cotton fields beyond them.

These were now deserted, for it was not the season for picking, nor were there any negroes left to work them. The bluffs could be seen far beyond the swamp. No sign of a Confederate was to be seen in the vicinity.

Old Jason paused now, and seemed not disposed to go further. He trembled like a whipped dog.

"Gemmens," he said, with chattering teeth, "I dese hope yo' let de ole man go back in de swamp now. Ole Marse Jones, he lib over yonder by the big live oak tree. I fink you fin' him at home if yo' goes ober dere. I recobn dis chile bettah keep out ob his way."

"All right, Jason," agreed Jack. "Although, you need fear nothing. We will see that no harm comes to you."

The negro hesitated.

"Does yo' fink yo' kin keep de ol' marse from catchin' me?" he asked.

"Oh, yes; we'll promise you that," said Jack. "You need not have the least bit of fear."

"Den I will go wif yo'."

"Very good. I wish you would, for we can make use of you later in showing us the way to the Yazoo."

"All right, sah."

It was now decided to approach the house of the planter by means of a lane in its rear. Weston and Jack led the way.

When they reached the big live oak tree they were able to see the garden which surrounded the planter's palatial home.

It was diversified with shell walks and hedges of box. In their season, roses and flowers bloomed there.

The great veranda of the house, double-decked and spacious, was deserted. The two Union men approached it.

They reached the broad steps and ascended them. The door stood half open. Voices could be heard beyond.

And both Jack and Weston paused as the words reached their ears.

"Hang me if you wish," said a rich, full voice, "but I am not a spy. I am an attache of General Sherman's staff. More than that I will not tell you."

Jack and Weston exchanged glances.

Then they softly stepped to the open door and, peering in, beheld a most startling scene.

The broad hallway of the great Southern home could be seen. At its far end a great window, studded with colored glass, furnished a soft light.

In the hall were half a dozen men in Confederate uniform. Leaning over the stair railing above were several white-faced women.

The men in the hall were mostly dressed in Confederate uniforms, and one of them was a colonel. The planter himself sat in a chair, nearer the door than the rest.

But the main object of interest, and what caused Jack and Weston a thrill, was the slender figure of a young Union officer, a mere boy, with lieutenant's shoulder-straps.

He was bound to the stair-post at the foot of the stairs. Heavy ropes held him there.

And his captors sat about the hall like members of an inquisition. The colonel, whose name was Farley, plied him with keen questions.

"We have every reason to believe that you are the one who captured General Pemberton's despatches," said Colonel Farley. "The boys who were entrusted with them described you quite well. You and the girl spy, Alice Varley, got those despatches."

CHAPTER XI.

IN A BAD FIX.

Contempt and scorn was in every line of the young Union lieutenant's face.

"That is your mistake," he said. "I am not the party you want. I am, as I tell you, simply one of General Sherman's attaches."

"What were you doing on the De Soto road?"

"I lost my way."

The Confederate colonel's face showed incredulity, and he continued:

"Your story is not to be credited. You know well enough what you did with those despatches. You know where the girl is. If you don't confess we will hang you."

The young lieutenant's eyes flashed.

"I am Lieutenant Will Allen, of General Sherman's staff," he replied. "I did not meet Miss Varley at the river a few hours ago, nor did I intercept despatches."

"You admit that you know Miss Varley?"

"Yes."

"You have seen her to-day?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"At the junction of the old Bayou road. She parted from me there."

"Do you know what her mission was?"

"She said she was going back to Vicksburg."

"The deceitful jade!" exclaimed Clay Jones, angrily. "She used my daughter and her hospitality as a shield while in Vicksburg."

"She must be captured," declared Colonel Farley. "She has done the Confederacy more harm than a whole regiment of Yankees could. She must be caught and imprisoned."

"And this young liar knows where she is," declared Clay Jones. "Hang him up by the thumbs for awhile, colonel. That will bring him to terms."

Colonel Farley arose, and said:

"This is your last chance, Allen. Will you confess?"

"Gentlemen," said the young lieutenant, forcibly, "do with me what you will. Shoot me if you wish. But I cannot do that which is beyond my power."

"Bah!" cried Jones. "What is the use of bothering with him? He is of no account! Hang the confounded Yankee up!"

To all this Jack Clark and Weston the scout had listened, spellbound. They knew at once that the prisoner was Lieutenant Will Allen, the sweetheart of the girl spy.

"Captain Clark," whispered Weston, "what shall we do? We cannot see him tortured to death."

"By no means!" cried Jack. "We must bring our boys and rescue him."

"Do you suppose these officers are here alone—that they have no Confederate guard hereabouts?"

"We saw nothing of them."

"That is true."

Jack Clark stepped down from the porch. The scout followed him. Swiftly they crossed the flower-bordered walks.

In a few moments they were back beneath the live oak tree, where they had left the Blues. Old Jason was still cowering there. Jack proceeded to catechise him sharply.

"Were there any Confederate officers at the house when you left?"

"Yes, sah."

"Did they have a guard? I mean are there Confederate soldiers hereabouts?"

The negro shook his head.

"No, sah. You needn't be afeard ob dat. Dey jest rides ober heah every day from de forts, sah. Yo' see, Marse Jones, he hab plenty of good whisky, an' he likes to talk wif dem. Dey is ober heah most of de time."

The negro's story seemed straightforward and logical enough. Jack had no reason to doubt it.

"Forward, boys!" he said, in a sharp tone. "We might as well make a bold attempt to rescue the lieutenant."

The Blues advanced toward the house. The shrubbery screened them, and as they advanced Jack saw that the Confederate officers had come out of the house, and the prisoner was between them.

They led him toward the live oak tree. One of them

carried a rope. The upper piazza of the house was now the vantage point of the female members of the household.

They saw the Blues, and were the first to give the alarm. Jack gave the word sharply:

"Forward, Blues! Surround them! Don't let them escape!"

It is hardly necessary to say that the Blues obeyed orders. Forward they rushed with lowered bayonets. The effect was startling.

With a yell the Confederate officers drew their pistols and fired. Then they fled.

After them went the Blues.

Clay Jones, the planter, made no attempt to escape. He stood his ground, and as Jack and Weston laid hands upon him he shook them off angrily, and cried:

"You hounds! What right have you to intrude here upon my grounds?"

"We can hardly regard you as a loyal citizen," replied Jack.

"I am loyal to the Confederacy," retorted the planter. "What right have you infernal Yankees down here in our country?"

"We wouldn't be here if we could help you, you can bet," declared Weston. "Now, Jones, make no resistance. You are a prisoner."

"I refuse to surrender!"

"Will ye compel us to use force?" asked the scout, as he took the planter by the shoulders and held him firmly.

Jones then subsided, but, catching a glimpse of Jason, he began to rave again.

"I see! That nigger brought you down upon us! Well, I'll hang him for it!"

Poor Jason was terrified beyond expression. He gave a yell and started on a mad run for the swamp.

"Let him go," said the scout, finally. "Of course I'd like his services mighty well to pilot us to the Yazoo. But if we can't get him, let him go."

The prisoner, Lieutenant Allen, had stood, wild-eyed and joyful, a witness of it all. As the planter was secured, Jack Clark stepped forward and said:

"I am glad to meet you, Lieutenant Allen. It seems we arrived in the nick of time."

"Indeed you did," replied the young lieutenant. "I am exceedingly obliged to you. I thought I was in for rough treatment."

The Blues had chased the Confederates to the stables behind the house. Here, by the hardest of luck, they had eluded their pursuers and, mounting their horses, had galloped away.

Their escape was a keen disappointment to Jack and Weston.

Their capture was necessary for one very cogent reason, and this was to prevent the alarm reaching the Confederate forts.

No doubt they would return with a large force; so it would be dangerous to linger in the vicinity long.

But Lieutenant Allen said:

"I lost my way, and that is how they captured me. But

I was to carry word to Colonel Lascelles, of the Illinois Volunteers, from General Morgan. I believe Lascelles is somewhere near here, and intends to bring a flank attack upon the Confederate trenches above here."

"How are things going below here?" asked the scout.

"Very badly. Smith was heavily repulsed this morning. It is going to be no child's play to capture Vicksburg on the present line of attack."

"We shall never do it," said the scout.

"Wait until General Grant brings reinforcements," said Jack. "You will then see a different story."

It was now a question as to what had better be done. To remain at the plantation would, of course, be suicidal. Colonel Farley would undoubtedly bring his men down to try and capture the Blues.

The women on the upper veranda of the house had been thrown into hysterics by the appearance on the scene of the Blues.

Jack hesitated a moment as to what he had better do with the planter Jones.

"He is no doubt a staunch friend of the Confederacy," declared Will Allen. "But at the present moment we do not want civilian prisoners. General Sherman has all he can do to take care of such prisoners as he has already taken."

"Then we will give him his freedom," declared Jack.

So the planter was released, though Jack gave him a few plain words of advice and warning.

It was a matter of regret that Jason had taken such French leave.

But finally the little party of Union fugitives set out down a lane leading from the plantation. This was away from the bluffs, and Jack believed it ought to take them to the Yazoo.

On they went, as fast as possible, and Jack gave Allen the girl spy's letter.

Will Allen, with Jack and Weston, led the way. They had gone fully half a mile, when suddenly a voice yelled:

"Stand and surrender! You're surrounded!"

The hail came from a clump of bushes beside the road. The next moment gray uniforms appeared on the scene.

Jack gave a quick order to his men. They instantly sprang back and deployed in line to make such defence as they could.

But the word rang out:

"Fire!"

A sweeping volley swept the line of blue. Jack Clark saw fully half of his brave band fall dead.

Weston shouted in the young captain's ear:

"It's no use to stand our ground. There's a hundred of 'em in the bushes there. Get out as quick as you can."

Suiting the action to the word, the scout went flying into the bushes beyond. Jack looked around him, but saw nothing of Will Allen.

The young captain followed the scout.

Bullets whistled about him, and several pierced his clothes. In another moment, though, he was deep in the undergrowth.

He heard the Confederates coming after him. He saw nothing of Weston.

On plunged the young captain.

Bullets whistled through the bushes; but he seemed to bear a charmed life, for none struck him.

On and on he ran. Then, panting and unable to go further, he came in sight of water.

He saw that he had reached the Yazoo. Jack paused a moment on the bank. He had thought of plunging in and swimming across.

But he knew that his pursuers would shoot him in the water. Already he heard them crashing through the bushes behind him.

CHAPTER XII.

FURBER'S PLUCK.

Escape seemed impossible. A wave of horror surged over Jack Clark.

He knew what capture meant. He had heard too much of Confederate prisons. It would seem better to die than to yield.

He looked right and left for a place to hide. There seemed no opportunity. What could he do?

But suddenly his quick eye caught a long network of roots from the base of a great cypress which overhung the river bank.

Throwing himself down, he slid over the bank and under the roots. He was in water up to his chin. But his head was under the roots and out of sight.

He could breathe, and managed to keep from sinking in the mud by hanging to one of the submerged roots.

Jack heard the Confederates as they came to the river bank.

Up and down the bank they went, seeking for a clew, but they found none.

The young captain was safe.

For a full half hour the search went on. It was finally abandoned, and they withdrew.

Not until he was sure that the coast was clear did Jack venture out of his hiding place. Then, silently he drew himself up on to the bank.

He was wet to the skin, of course, and the air was chill. It was an uncomfortable feeling, but Jack made the best of it.

He pulled off his clothes and wrung the water out of them. Then he put them on, knowing that vigorous exercise would keep him warm while the garments dried on him.

It was now a question what to do.

Jack felt a terrible pang when he thought of the brave little detachment of Blues who had just met their fate.

Five of them had been killed. The other five were prisoners, he felt sure.

But, even as he reached this conclusion, a rustling in the undergrowth brought him to his feet.

But a voice said, reassuringly:

"Don't ye mind, captain! I'm all right. It's only Furber."

Private Furber stepped out of the bushes. In all his life Jack had never felt so truly glad to see any one before.

"Furber!" he cried. "Thank Heaven, you are alive!"

"Yes," said the brave fellow, "but I fear I am the only survivor. All the rest are gone."

"Killed?"

"Five were killed, as I know of. The others were captured. I made a dash when I saw you leave. A Johnny caught me with his bayonet in the seat of my trousers. But it only ripped 'em a little."

"Well, Furber, I am glad you escaped. It is awful to think that we have lost nine of our brave boys."

"That's so, captain. But, supposing it had been you?"

Jack was touched by this tribute. He gripped Furber's hand.

"It is the chances of war," he said. "We were more fortunate than the others. I would like to know if Allen and Weston also escaped."

"I think they did, captain. But, I reckon it's a little risky hanging around here. Oughtn't we to get across and join the company?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "We will do so at once. Can you swim?"

"Can an eagle fly? I could live under the water."

"That's good! It looks like a case of swim or die!" laughed the young captain. "Let's try it."

At once they divested themselves of their uniforms. A log lying on the bank was rolled into the water.

On this the uniforms were placed. Then Jack and Furber slipped into the water and started out into the current, pushing the log before them.

The Yazoo has but little current. It is a black, sluggish stream.

On swam the two young soldiers. They drew nearer the opposite bank.

Suddenly a splashing was heard and the puffing of an engine. Furber gave a gasping cry:

"Holy smoke! Our cake is dough, Captain Clark!" he exclaimed.

Jack looked over the log and experienced a thrill.

He saw that the other was right. Around the bend in the stream there came a small gunboat.

For a moment the young captain's heart stood still. He saw that at the prow of the gunboat was a Confederate flag.

All seemed lost.

Furber, who was on the side of the log nearest the gunboat, dived under the log and came up on Jack's side.

As he came up he placed one hand on the log, and with the other swept the uniforms under water, not, however, relaxing his hold on them.

Then he exclaimed:

"It's our only chance, captain. Keep the water at your chin. Keep the log between us and the boat. They may miss seeing us."

Jack saw the clever private's point at once, and quickly said:

"Good for you, Furber! You are all right. We will take the chance."

"If they saw me pull the clothes off the log we're lost. If they didn't I think we are all right."

"If they spot us," whispered Furber, "let the log go and dive, captain. Swim under water as far as you can, and then dive again. We might make the shore before they could get us."

"All right," agreed the boy captain. "You are a regular duck, Furber."

"If they didn't have so fast a boat I'd take chances on fooling them now," said Furber. "It's mighty hard to hit a disappearing object in the water with a bullet."

"They seem to be working toward us," said Jack, anxiously.

This was true.

Under a slow head of steam the gunboat was hugging the shore. Seeing this, the boys began to dog-paddle under water, forcing the log further toward the middle of the stream.

For a moment they were sure they had been seen.

Both expected to hear the crash of rifles and feel the thud of bullets in the log. They were ready for the desperate swim for life.

But the volley did not come.

The gunboat, slowing her speed, began to drift down toward them. Now fresh fear seized them.

It seemed certain that they were discovered, and that those on board the boat were merely drawing near to pick them up alive.

"They want to capture us," whispered Furber. "We are done for, captain. It's too far to swim to the other shore."

This was true enough.

The gunboat had drifted between them and the shore they had hoped to reach. No matter every moment they were drawn toward the craft.

Discovery seemed inevitable. The boys had almost decided to hold up a hand and ask for quarter.

But just then a voice came from the pilot house of the boat:

"Look out for that log, Bill! Don't let her fool them paddles. Back water!"

The water foamed and whirled, and the log slid directly under the quarter of the gunboat at the paddle wheels.

A rope trailed alongside.

As they swept under the boat's stern the quick-witted Furber grasped this. He hung on to it a moment, and then said:

"We'll be seen when the log swings out. Let go and stick to the rope for awhile. When she gets near the shore we'll drop off and swim for it."

Jack obeyed in an instant.

The log went whirling back into the ruck of waters. The two boys clung to the rope. Furber still clung to the bundle of clothing.

The gunboat was moving very slowly, but, to the dismay of the boys, it drew away from the shore.

They were now indeed in a serious plight. If the gunboat should increase her speed they must relax their hold or be drowned in the smoother of waters.

But the boat, instead, seemed to come almost to a stop. Then a startling thing happened. A heavy roar broke upon the air. The boat shivered from stem to stern.

She had fired her forward gun.

The boys knew well now what was taking place. She had come down to draw the fire of the Union batteries.

Her guns began to speak loudly. In a few moments there was an answer. A shell struck the water fifty feet away and threw spray over her.

Shells began to fall all about.

"Gee-whizz!" exclaimed Furber. "I can't say I like this. Hello!"

He gave a sharp cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" asked Jack.

"Oh, we're ruined!" groaned the young private. "Our clothes are gone. I lost my hold on them."

"Great Caesar!" gasped Jack. "What shall we do?"

"Whew! I don't know!" moaned Furber. "We're not in the Garden of Eden."

"Hardly! But there is little chance of being criticised, if we do get ashore. It is hardly a comfortable feeling to be without clothes."

"Well, I should say!"

"What shall we do?"

Furber whistled softly. The situation did not seem to daunt him in the least.

He looked along the sheer of the gunboat's stern. He saw a wooden bumper hanging over the side.

Without an instant's hesitation, he let go the rope and grasped the bumper. He signaled Jack to follow.

Then he drew himself out of the water and disappeared.

Astonished Jack also let go of the rope. He drifted to the bumper and grasped it. Then he looked up and beheld a startling sight.

He saw a pair of legs vanishing through a port in the vessel's side. The rope which supported the bumper was within reach of this port.

In an instant Jack grasped the idea.

He saw that the crew were all at the guns. None were at this side of the boat. Therefore, the two young swimmers could not be seen, and were safe.

Jack drew himself out of the water.

CHAPTER XIII.

DESTRUCTION OF THE GUNBOAT.

Up the bumper the boy captain went like a monkey. Just then Furber stuck his head out of the port and whispered:

"Holy smoke! Everything is ours! Come on up!"

It is needless to say that Jack went "on up." He reached the open port and swung himself in.

He saw that they had entered the cabin stateroom of some of the officers. The bunks were supplied with mattresses and blankets. All was snug and comfortable.

On the wall was a brace of Springfield rifles, no doubt captured from the Yankees.

There were a few other things of value, also, to our two

young up-to-date water nymphs. Furber opened the cover of a chest and whistled.

It was filled with uniforms. The young private pulled one out and scanned it critically.

"This fits me," he said. "I hate to enter the Confederate service, but it seems to be a case of sink or swim."

"You'd never sink!" laughed Jack.

"Is that so?" demurred Furber. "I'm not so punky or light as you think. But here's a good uniform for you. Won't we be quite swell Johnnies, eh?"

"I suppose we will," said Jack, working himself into the uniform. "But, for me there's no color like the blue."

"I'll lift my hat to that sentiment any time," declared Furber.

In a few moments the two young soldiers of the Union were full-fledged Confederates, so far as outward appearances went.

But the next question was, what were they to do?

They were aboard the enemy's gunboat. At that moment the guns of the craft were barking defiance at the Union battery.

It was evident that the latter was getting the worst of it, too, for loud cheers could be heard.

"By jingo!" exclaimed Furber, "I'd like to take a look out there. It looks as if they were giving it to our boys hard."

"Let us risk it!" said Jack. "I think if we sneak aft we can do it."

"It's a go!"

So the young soldiers did a daring thing. They crept out of the stateroom and walked boldly to the rear of the gunboat.

That they were seen by the crew who were forward there was no doubt. But the light was not good on the lower deck, so that their faces were in shadow.

As a result, their appearance aroused not the least particle of suspicion.

"They don't know us," said Furber, coolly. "Do you know, Captain Clark, the Johnnies are the easiest ever to fool?"

"I don't know," demurred Jack. "I have seen times when I didn't think so."

"Well, we're doing the trick now."

"That's true!"

By this time they had reached a gun port on the starboard side. Leaning out, they saw a Union redoubt about a half mile distant.

The gunboat was plumping shells right into it, and it was heaped with dead bodies in blue.

A desultory fire was being returned, showing that the place was being held by only a slender hope.

It made Furber's blood boil.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, with flashing eyes. "Do you see that, Captain Clark? They're waxing the tar out of our boys. It's got to stop."

"I don't see how we can stop it."

Furber turned to Jack curiously.

"Don't you?"

"No."

"Well, I do."

"How?"

"I'll show you. Just at this moment the crew are all forward?"

"Yes."

"Now, there's a hatch there which leads down into the hold. I saw them hoist some powder kegs out of there awhile ago."

Jack looked wonderingly at Furber.

"Well?" he said.

Furber snapped his teeth like a wolf.

"When my mad is up I'm dangerous," he said. "My idea is to sneak down there when the gang is not looking. We'll lay a nice little fuse to those powder barrels down there. Then we'll skate back up here, and overboard we go. Do you see?"

Jack caught the idea.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Say, Furber, I'm going to promote you."

"I don't want it! I'm Private Jim Furber, and that's all. I would not be a major-general for all the money you ever saw."

Jack laughed and said:

"Too bad to wet our new uniforms!"

"Humph! They'll get theirs wet, too. It'll be a case of who is the best swimmer."

It did not take long for Furber to elaborate his plan. There was no time to lose.

The Union battery was fast going out of existence. Unless the gunboat was quickly put out of commission the battery would be silenced.

Furber watched his chance.

Then he slipped down into the hold. Jack remained by the rail and waited.

It seemed an interminable length of time before the daring young private reappeared. He was a surprising sight.

His face was blackened with powder, and his uniform was bedraggled. He glanced at Jack, and then said:

"Come on!"

Furber now set up a yell.

"Look out, boys! Get overboard! The boat is going up. There's a Yankee shell in the hold."

Yelling thus, the daring young private ran the whole length of the deck and went over the rail like an arrow. His words and action had an electrifying effect upon the Confederate gunners.

His face was too heavily blackened for them to recognize him. They saw smoke pouring up out of the hatch.

That sight was enough. Without further word of warning and with yells of terror they made quick action.

The gunners dropped their spongers and their rammers. One and all went over the rail in quick order.

Those who could not swim grasped the nearest object that was able to sustain them and went over.

Jack had already leaped overboard and was swimming for the shore.

He had hardly got fifty yards from the gunboat when there was a terrific roar. The water rose in great tidal waves and carried the swimmers high over the banks. When it receded the next instant it left most of them high on land.

Those in the Union battery had seen the upheaval, and swarmed over the parapet with wild cheers.

With bayonets they came charging down. But the half hundred or more of the gunboat's crew were not in a condition to make resistance.

They surrendered unconditionally.

The gunboat was already at the bottom of the river. The battery was saved.

Jack Clark drew himself out of the water and wrung the water out of his gray uniform as well as he could. He was thus engaged when he heard a chuckling laugh.

Turning, he saw Furber.

"Well," said the young private, triumphantly, "what do you think of the situation now, captain? Didn't we give 'em a dose?"

"I should say we did!" cried Jack. "But here are our boys now."

Half a dozen Union soldiers, with bayonets leveled, rushed at them.

"Surrender, you confounded Confederates!" they cried.

"Eh?" cried Jack. "What's the matter with you? We are not Confederates. We are as good Yankees as you are."

"Hands up now!" called the sergeant of the guard, sternly. "Your bluff won't work! Fall in!"

The guard pricked the boys lightly with the steel, and they fell in without remonstrance, though Furber was mad clear through.

"You fools!" he snapped. "Can't you see we're not Confederates? I'm Jim Furber, and this is Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues."

"You can tell that story to Colonel Rollins," said the sergeant. "Maybe he'll believe you."

"All right! Take us to him."

At that moment a tall man, who wore a colonel's straps, approached. The sergeant saluted, and said:

"Colonel, here are two men who claim to be loyal."

The colonel shot a keen glance at the boys.

"That won't work," he said. "Put them under guard."

"One moment, sir!" cried Jack, heatedly.

"Well?"

"You ought to see at once by our looks and our vernacular that we are not Confederates. We're as good Yankees as you are. I am Captain Clark, of the Fairdale Blues. I demand that you release us."

"I don't know you," said Rollins, coldly. "You were on the gunboat, and you wear the Confederate uniform. That stamps you as an enemy to the United States. If you can prove your claims later, do so."

"See here, my friend," said Furber, hotly, "we're not used to having our word doubted. If it hadn't been for us you and your picayune battery would have been kindling wood by this time."

"Eh?" said the colonel, sarcastically. "How did you bring that about?"

"By blowing up the gunboat."

"Blowing it up?"

"Yes."

The colonel was incredulous. Furber told the whole story in detail. It made some effect upon him, but he said:

"If your story can be proved, you have done a great service. I shall see that it is investigated. In the meantime you will remain under guard."

It was an exasperating situation. But, as a last resort, Furber said:

"Go to the captain and the crew of the boat. They'll tell you we don't belong to their army."

Colonel Rollins turned to the sergeant.

"March them down to the place where the rest of the prisoners are. I'll investigate this matter presently."

So the two Blues were herded with the captured Confederates. But there was no help for it.

Presently Rollins came up and said:

"Where is the captain of the gunboat?"

"I am the captain," said a thin-faced Southerner.

"Oh, you are! Well, tell me if these are not members of your crew?" and he indicated Jack and Furber.

The captain turned his gaze on the boys, and replied, instantly:

"No, sah; they are not, sah."

"Who are they, then?"

"Never saw 'em before in my life, sah."

"There!" cried Furber. "Are you satisfied now? We saved you and your battery, and this is the way you repay us."

Rollins hesitated a moment. It was plain that he was stubborn.

"No," he said, "I am not satisfied. I am going to hold you until General Smith comes up. If you can prove your identity then you may go."

Furber groaned and said:

"I wish we'd let you and your old battery go to perdition!"

But, just at that moment a startling thing happened. There was a terrific hiss and a thud, and a great shell struck the ground but a few yards away.

Furber dropped, and pulled Jack down with him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RETREAT IS ORDERED.

What followed was fearful to describe. The shell burst with an awful roar.

It made a pit in the soft soil deep enough to bury a dozen men. Human bodies and fragments were hurled into the air.

Colonel Rollins was one of the unfortunates to be hit by the shell. Hardly a piece of his body could have been found.

A number of the Confederate prisoners were killed and wounded. Six Union soldiers were killed.

Jack's life had been saved, undoubtedly, by the presence of mind of Furber. The two boys were hurled some yards away, but unhurt, save by bruises.

Furber struggled to his feet.

"Whew!" he gasped. "Who the deuce fired that powder magazine at us? Hello! We'd better get out of here."

From the direction of Vicksburg another gunboat had swung into view. She was larger and had heavier guns. Her shells were plumping right down into the entrenchments and tearing things all to pieces.

Human courage could not stand before anything so frightful, so all fled, as by one consent.

There was no attempt made to constrain the prisoners. They were as afraid as the Union soldiers, and skurried away unimpeded.

Jack and Furber were the last to leave. The private cried, excitedly:

"I say, old man, it's no use for us to try to blow up that boat. We might as well get out of here. There's none to dispute us now."

So half an hour later found the two young soldiers threading the swampy forest in search of the main body of the army.

Jack had no doubt that the Blues were with the main army now.

There was every indication that Sherman would abandon his attack and retire from the locality.

It was Jack's purpose now to find the remnant of his company as quickly as possible.

On through the wilds they pushed, listening and straining their gaze. They soon came to higher land, and suddenly Furber exclaimed:

"Sh! Hold back, captain! There's danger ahead."

They had come to the edge of a little dale. Smoke arose from it. For a moment the two fugitives were undecided what to do.

Was it friend or foe in that dale?

Furber crept forward to investigate.

In a few moments he returned, and said:

"Captain, we want to steer clear of this place. There's half a hundred Confed's down there around their camp."

It was a close call. The two young soldiers passed cautiously around the spot.

But it was a lesson to them. They knew that the region was replete with peril. Only the greatest of caution could pull them through.

Leaving the camp of the Confederates behind them, the boys pushed on and soon were deep in the swamp again.

But this time they came to a road which had been constructed by the sappers and miners of Sherman's army.

It was of corduroy construction, and an overturned gun carriage here and there showed with what haste Smith had retreated over it but a few hours before.

The boys took the direction leading out of the swamp. They trudged along with stoical spirit.

They had now reached a point in the corduroy road where it intersected a dirt road. This indicated that they were out of the swamp.

And Furber suddenly flourished his arms and cheered. Just ahead the moving folds of the Stars and Stripes were to be seen. In another moment the boys saw serried ranks of blue marching north.

They pushed forward, and soon reached the flanking column.

Of a straggling private they asked:

"Whose division is this?"

"It's General Morgan's," was the reply. "We have got orders to retreat. The Johnnies were too strong for us."

"Morgan!" cried Jack. "Then the Blues must be with them."

And just then he heard a rippling cheer, and saw caps waving in the air. The Blues, marching in regimental line, had caught sight of their young captain.

Lieutenant Martin came rushing up like a maniac, fairly delirious with joy.

"They all said you were killed, Jack!" he cried. "But I knew you would turn up all right."

"Yes, Hal," replied the boy captain; "and be sure, I am thankful to be back."

"Where are the others?"

"There are no others," said Furber, reverently. "Five of them are dead. Four are prisoners. By a strange irony of fate, I, the most valueless among them, am spared."

"Valueless!" cried Jack. "It would take me an hour to tell you all the wonderful things Furber has done."

Hal was delighted.

"Furber is in line for promotion," he said.

"No, sir!" protested the private. "I am not going to change. I am only a private, and such I'll always remain."

But just then the clatter of hoofs was heard, and General Morgan and his staff came riding up. The general's gaze rested upon Jack, and he cried:

"Why, here is Captain Clark! Come here, Clark! Why haven't you reported before?"

"I have just got through," replied Jack. "I was about to report."

"Well, what have you learned?"

"That the foe is very strong north and West of Vicksburg. We captured despatches of Pemberton's and sent them to you."

"Yes," replied General Morgan, "and they are the cause of our retreat at the present moment."

Jack was surprised.

"How is that, sir?"

"Oh, have no fear! The capture of those despatches saved this army. The Confederates had it so fixed that we would have been annihilated. Thanks to the timely discovery, we have got out in time."

"Then the attack is abandoned?"

"Yes; we are going north to Arkansas Post. The Confederate forces there menace our rear. It would be awkward, you know, to have them slip down and cut us off."

"I should say so," agreed Jack. "But, General Morgan, I would ask the privilege of detaching my company for an enterprise of great importance."

"Very good," agreed the general. "Do as you please; but don't sacrifice yourself."

"We shall take care of that, sir."

General Morgan rode away. Hal turned to Jack with amazement.

"What did you mean?" he asked. "What important work have you in view?"

"Can't you guess?" said Jack, quietly. "You know, I told you that Weston and Lieutenant Allen were hotly pursued by the Confederates. I have no doubt that they are prisoners. We must rescue them, if possible."

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"Will it be possible?"

"We will try."

The Blues now dropped out of the line of the retreating army. It was a joyful thing for them to have their young captain back.

Jack lost no time in organizing them for the expedition in quest of Weston and Allen.

They now started back along the road toward the river. As Jack reflected there was a possibility that Weston and Allen had evaded capture and swam the river.

If so, they might be lost somewhere in the depths of the swamp. In any event, they must be found.

So the Blues pressed on until they came to the river. Along the lower bank they proceeded cautiously.

Suddenly a distant cry was heard. A moment later a man came out of the bushes some distance away and ran toward them.

It was Weston the scout.

It is needless to say that he was heartily welcomed by the Blues. But the scout was excited and nervous.

"Something must be done at once, Clark," he declared.

"Poor Allen swam the river with me, but he was captured by the guerillas, and he is now in their hands. They will certainly hang him."

"Not if it can be prevented," said Jack. "Do you know where his captors are?"

"Yes. I escaped them. They are a mile down the river, in a clearing in the woods. They have a camp there. I slipped their guard and escaped."

"All right," said Jack, resolutely. "We will get him."

The boy captain at once ordered the Blues forward. They set out at the double-quick down the river.

Weston led the way.

Rapidly they went on. Suddenly, though, the scout turned and exclaimed, excitedly:

"Look out! We are in danger. I believe there is a gunboat coming around the bend yonder."

The next moment the black nose of a gunboat shot around the bend in the river. The Confederate flag in the prow showed that she was to be avoided.

The Blues, however, were seen, for there was a roar from the forward gun, and a shell came tearing through the bushes.

Jack gave orders to his boys to quickly fall back. But the temptation was great to try a little sharpshooting.

So the boys dodged into the bushes and, in turn, opened

fire with their Springfields. It was not difficult to get a line on the gunners.

Several were picked off. But the shell fire became so hot that Jack ordered the Blues back to a safe distance in the woods.

A detour was made and the gunboat left behind. Then the Blues pushed forward again to find the guerillas. Weston led the way.

CHAPTER XV.

A TIMELY RESCUE.—THE END.

It was not long before the scout led the way down into a swampy road. A small bridge of logs crossing a creek was reached.

The Blues crossed this, and then the scout held up his hand.

"Let the boys wait here," he whispered. "The signal for them to advance will be a whistle. Captain Clark, please accompany me."

Jack at once complied. With the scout he soon turned from the road, and through the trees saw the blaze of camp fires.

"Here we are," whispered the scout. "Ah! Now you can see!"

The scene beheld by the boy captain was a startling one.

In the glade were several camp fires. Two score rough-clad men, of the guerilla type, were lounging about them.

To a tree in the center of the camp there was bound a young Union officer. It required but a glance for Jack to recognize the handsome young lieutenant, Will Allen.

"There you are!" whispered Weston. "Do you see that dark-featured fellow over there by that cypress? Well, he is Morton, the captain of the band. He is one of the most lawless and cruel of all the raiders of the Confederate service."

"I have heard of him," said Jack.

Then both the young captain and the scout became witnesses of a remarkable scene.

Even as they looked upon the scene the Confederate leader advanced, and in a loud voice said:

"Bring the dog of a Yankee out here! He can tell us what we want to know. If he don't we'll hang him."

In an instant a couple of guerillas sprung forward. The bonds of the prisoner were undone, and he was led forward.

Facing his captors, Lieutenant Allen was calm and brave. The guerilla leader leaned forward with a sinister glare and asked:

"You confounded Yankee, I want the truth from you! When we captured you, I knew you were carrying despatches. What have you done with them?"

"I decline to answer your question," said Allen, coldly.

"You do, eh?"

"I do."

"Do you know what refusal means?"

"I don't care what it means."

The guerilla leader made a gesture to a couple of his men. They at once came forward with a rope.

"Fetch him up here under this tree," said Morton, savagely. "We'll see if he will defy me."

Jack turned and whispered:

"Ought we not to interfere now?"

"Wait half a minute," said the scout, as he cocked his pistol. "I'll shoot the man who attempts to pull the rope. That will be the signal."

But just at that moment a startling thing occurred. Through the undergrowth opposite Jack and the scout there appeared the figure of a young girl.

Into the guerilla camp she boldly sprung. In her hands were pistols, and her eyes flashed with a deadly light.

"Back!" she screamed. "Do not harm one hair of his head! You have no right to hang him! He is not a spy, but a prisoner of war."

Astounded, the guerillas started back. Morton turned livid, and gasped:

"The female spy, of Vicksburg!"

As for Allen, he shook off his captors and sprung forward to take the brave young girl in his arms.

"Alice," he said, fervently, "I shall die happier now that you are with me."

Jack Clark and Weston were deeply impressed. The boy captain whispered:

"Don't you think we had better strike now?"

"Wait!" said the scout.

For some moments Morton, the guerilla chief, stared at the brave young girl and her lover. But, whatever of shame he may have felt for his conduct was but momentary.

His face again flashed with anger, and he cried:

"Tear them apart! Hang her, too, if she makes trouble. She is a spy, and deserves the fate of such."

Like a tigress the brave young girl turned upon the guerilla chief. She leveled a pistol at him.

"If either of us die, you die first!" she cried. "It is contrary to the rules of warfare to hang a prisoner who can be convicted of nothing worse than you can charge against him. We demand that he be taken to General Pemberton's headquarters."

The guerilla's face flushed angrily.

"General Pemberton exercises no authority over me," he said. "I am not bound by any military obligation. Mine is a free company."

"Then you are outlaws and deserve hanging!" she cried.

"Perhaps so! But at this moment the power is in my hands," said the guerilla chief, with a suave smile.

"Now is the time to act," said Weston, in a hoarse whisper. "Bring your boys up, Jack."

The young captain blew his whistle. The scout stepped out with drawn pistols and said:

"Hands up, every dog of you! You are surrounded! Surrender or die!"

The Blues came dashing through the undergrowth. The bayonets gleaming before them caused the guerillas to throw up their hands.

Aghast, Morton turned, and seemed for a moment to look for an avenue of escape.

But there was none.

"I yield!" he said, sullenly. "The Old Nick himself can't beat you Yankees."

Will Allen gave a great cry of joy, and the girl spy, overcome with joy, fell half fainting into his arms.

In less time than it takes to tell it the guerillas were under guard, and Jack and Hal and Weston were shaking hands with the happy young couple.

It was a timely rescue, and it need hardly be said that Will Allen and his sweetheart were happy with the result.

The guerillas were quickly lined up, and no time was lost in beginning the return march.

Rapidly the Blues pushed on, to overtake Morgan's retreating army. It was evening when they reached the point of embarkation on the river and were ordered aboard a river boat.

Sherman's attack on Vicksburg was at an end.

It was to be renewed successfully later on, as we may tell in a future story. But now the entire army went back to the Mississippi and began the great move upon Arkansas Post.

The Blues, however, went into camp with others just above Vicksburg. For a time they were enabled to gain much needed rest and recruit their ranks.

Weston, the scout, took leave of Jack Clark and his boys with regret. He was destined to meet them, however, later in the war.

Will Allen had received a slight wound in the fight before Vicksburg, and, this now assuming a serious phase, he was temporarily relieved from service. When he went north on his furlough the girl spy of Vicksburg, Alice Varley, went with him, and before Lieutenant Allen returned to the front they were happily married.

And with this announcement our story reaches its end.

Jack Clark and his Fairdale Blues were given a brief rest, which only made them more eager to get into the field again.

How their turn soon came, and what daring deeds they performed, we will leave to another story.

THE END.

Read "STANDING THEIR GROUND: OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY'S STUBBORN FIGHT," which will be the next number (30) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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